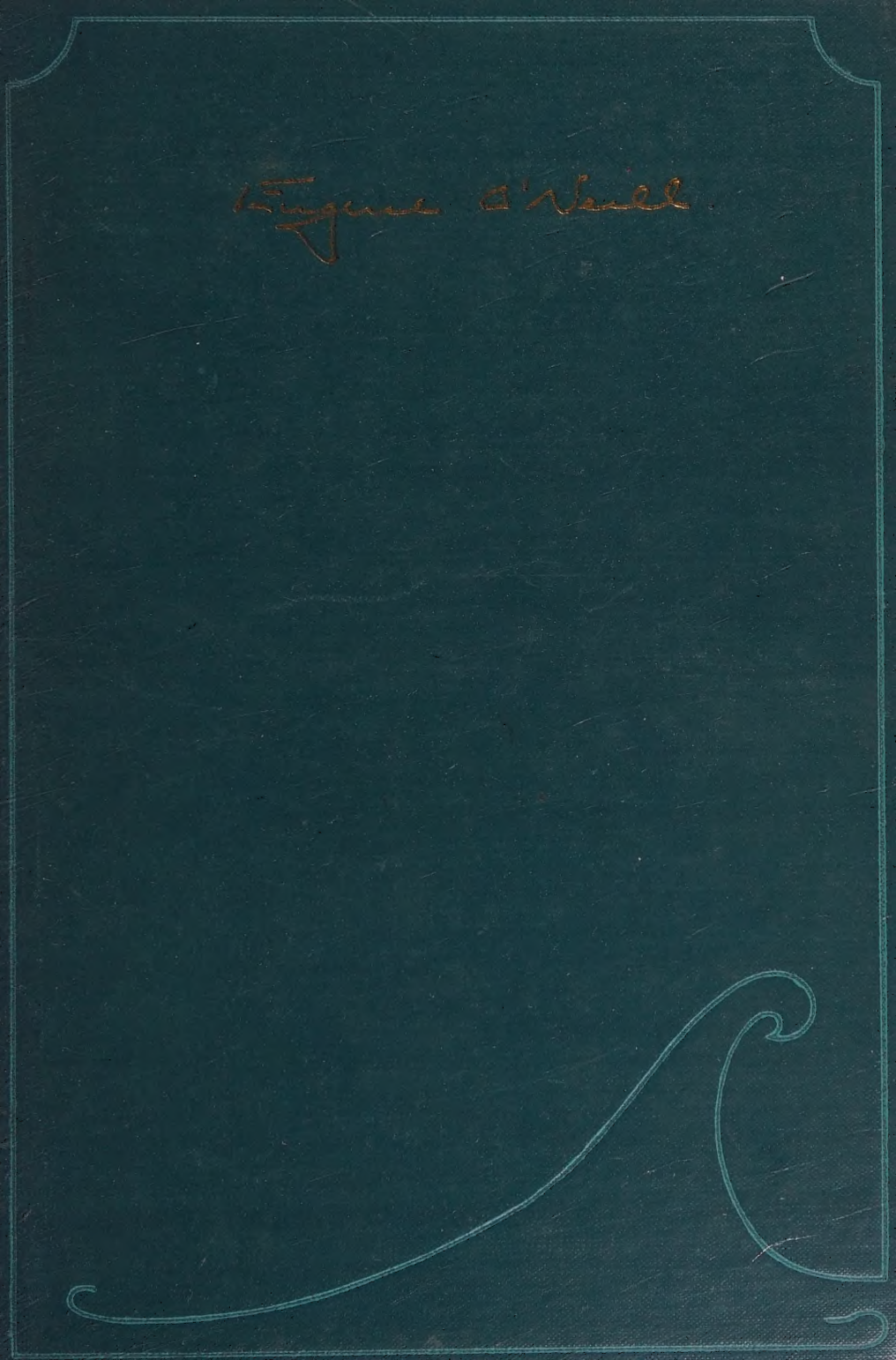

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THE STRAW

BEFORE BREAKFAST

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Plays

BEYOND THE HORIZON
THE STRAW
BEFORE BREAKFAST

NEW YORK
BONI & LIVERIGHT
1925

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BEYOND THE HORIZON

A Play in Three Acts

(1918)

TO AGNES

CHARACTERS

JAMES MAYO, *a farmer*
KATE MAYO, *his wife*
CAPTAIN DICK SCOTT, *of the bark* Sunda, *her brother*

ANDREW MAYO
ROBERT MAYO
} *sons of* JAMES MAYO

RUTH ATKINS
MRS. ATKINS, *her widowed mother*
MARY
BEN, *a farm hand*
DOCTOR FAWCETT

ACT I

SCENE I: The Road. Sunset of a day in Spring.
SCENE II: The Farm House. The same night.

ACT II

(*Three years later*)

SCENE I: The Farm House. Noon of a Summer day.
SCENE II: The top of a hill on the farm overlooking the sea. The following day.

ACT III

(*Five years later*)

SCENE I: The Farm House. Dawn of a day in late Fall.
SCENE II: The Road. Sunrise.

BEYOND THE HORIZON

ACT ONE

BEYOND THE HORIZON

ACT ONE

Scene One

A section of country highway. The road runs diagonally from the left, forward, to the right, rear, and can be seen in the distance winding toward the horizon like a pale ribbon between the low, rolling hills with their freshly plowed fields clearly divided from each other, checkerboard fashion, by the lines of stone walls and rough snake fences.

The forward triangle cut off by the road is a section of a field from the dark earth of which myriad bright-green blades of fall-sown rye are sprouting. A straggling line of piled rocks, too low to be called a wall, separates this field from the road.

To the rear of the road is a ditch with a sloping, grassy bank on the far side. From the center of this an old, gnarled apple tree, just budding into leaf, strains its twisted branches heavenwards, black against the pallor of distance. A snake-fence sidles from left to right along the top of the bank, passing beneath the apple tree.

The hushed twilight of a day in May is just beginning. The horizon hills are still rimmed by a faint line of flame, and the sky above them glows with the crimson flush of the sunset. This fades gradually as the action of the scene progresses.

At the rise of the curtain, ROBERT MAYO *is discovered sitting*

on the fence. He is a tall, slender young man of twenty-three. There is a touch of the poet about him expressed in his high forehead and wide, dark eyes. His features are delicate and refined, leaning to weakness in the mouth and chin. He is dressed in gray corduroy trousers pushed into high laced boots, and a blue flannel shirt with a bright colored tie. He is reading a book by the fading sunset light. He shuts this, keeping a finger in to mark the place, and turns his head toward the horizon, gazing out over the fields and hills. His lips move as if he were reciting something to himself.

His brother ANDREW *comes along the road from the right, returning from his work in the fields. He is twenty-seven years old, an opposite type to* ROBERT—*husky, sun-bronzed, handsome in a large-featured, manly fashion—a son of the soil, intelligent in a shrewd way, but with nothing of the intellectual about him. He wears overalls, leather boots, a gray flannel shirt open at the neck, and a soft, mud-stained hat pushed back on his head. He stops to talk to* ROBERT, *leaning on the hoe he carries.*

ANDREW. (*seeing* ROBERT *has not noticed his presence—in a loud shout*) Hey there! (ROBERT *turns with a start. Seeing who it is, he smiles*) Gosh, you do take the prize for daydreaming! And I see you've toted one of the old books along with you. (*He crosses the ditch and sits on the fence near his brother*) What is it this time—poetry, I'll bet. (*He reaches for the book*) Let me see.

ROBERT. (*handing it to him rather reluctantly*) Look out you don't get it full of dirt.

ANDREW. (*glancing at his hands*) That isn't dirt—it's

good clean earth. (*He turns over the pages. His eyes read something and he gives an exclamation of disgust*) Hump! (*With a provoking grin at his brother he reads aloud in a doleful, sing-song voice*) "I have loved wind and light and the bright sea. But holy and most sacred night, not as I love and have loved thee." (*He hands the book back*) Here! Take it and bury it. I suppose it's that year in college gave you a liking for that kind of stuff. I'm darn glad I stopped at High School, or maybe I'd been crazy too. (*He grins and slaps* ROBERT *on the back affectionately*) Imagine me reading poetry and plowing at the same time! The team'd run away, I'll bet.

ROBERT. (*laughing*) Or picture me plowing.

ANDREW. You should have gone back to college last fall, like I know you wanted to. You're fitted for that sort of thing—just as I ain't.

ROBERT. You know why I didn't go back, Andy. Pa didn't like the idea, even if he didn't say so; and I know he wanted the money to use improving the farm. And besides, I'm not keen on being a student, just because you see me reading books all the time. What I want to do now is keep on moving so that I won't take root in any one place.

ANDREW. Well, the trip you're leaving on tomorrow will keep you moving all right. (*At this mention of the trip they both fall silent. There is a pause. Finally* ANDREW *goes on, awkwardly, attempting to speak casually*) Uncle says you'll be gone three years.

ROBERT. About that, he figures.

ANDREW. (*moodily*) That's a long time.

ROBERT. Not so long when you come to consider it. You

know the *Sunda* sails around the Horn for Yokohama first, and that's a long voyage on a sailing ship; and if we go to any of the other places Uncle Dick mentions—India, or Australia, or South Africa, or South America—they'll be long voyages, too.

ANDREW. You can have all those foreign parts for all of me. (*After a pause*) Ma's going to miss you a lot, Rob.

ROBERT. Yes—and I'll miss her.

ANDREW. And Pa ain't feeling none too happy to have you go—though he's been trying not to show it.

ROBERT. I can see how he feels.

ANDREW. And you can bet that I'm not giving any cheers about it. (*He puts one hand on the fence near* ROBERT).

ROBERT. (*putting one hand on top of* ANDREW's *with a gesture almost of shyness*) I know that, too, Andy.

ANDREW. I'll miss you as much as anybody, I guess. You see, you and I ain't like most brothers—always fighting and separated a lot of the time, while we've always been together—just the two of us. It's different with us. That's why it hits so hard, I guess.

ROBERT. (*with feeling*) It's just as hard for me, Andy—believe that! I hate to leave you and the old folks—but—I feel I've got to. There's something calling me—— (*He points to the horizon*) Oh, I can't just explain it to you, Andy.

ANDREW. No need to, Rob. (*Angry at himself*) Hell! You want to go—that's all there is to it; and I wouldn't have you miss this chance for the world.

ROBERT. It's fine of you to feel that way, Andy.

ANDREW. Huh! I'd be a nice son-of-a-gun if I didn't, wouldn't I? When I know how you need this sea trip to

make a new man of you—in the body, I mean—and give you your full health back.

ROBERT. (*a trifle impatiently*) All of you seem to keep harping on my health. You were so used to seeing me lying around the house in the old days that you never will get over the notion that I'm a chronic invalid. You don't realize how I've bucked up in the past few years. If I had no other excuse for going on Uncle Dick's ship but just my health, I'd stay right here and start in plowing.

ANDREW. Can't be done. Farming ain't your nature. There's all the difference shown in just the way us two feel about the farm. You—well, you like the home part of it, I expect; but as a place to work and grow things, you hate it. Ain't that right?

ROBERT. Yes, I suppose it is. For you it's different. You're a Mayo through and through. You're wedded to the soil. You're as much a product of it as an ear of corn is, or a tree. Father is the same. This farm is his life-work, and he's happy in knowing that another Mayo, inspired by the same love, will take up the work where he leaves off. I can understand your attitude, and Pa's; and I think it's wonderful and sincere. But I—well, I'm not made that way.

ANDREW. No, you ain't; but when it comes to understanding, I guess I realize that you've got your own angle of looking at things.

ROBERT. (*musingly*) I wonder if you do, really.

ANDREW. (*confidently*) Sure I do. You've seen a bit of the world, enough to make the farm seem small, and you've got the itch to see it all.

ROBERT. It's more than that, Andy.

ANDREW. Oh, of course. I know you're going to learn navigation, and all about a ship, so's you can be an officer. That's natural, too. There's fair pay in it, I expect, when you consider that you've always got a home and grub thrown in; and if you're set on traveling, you can go anywhere you're a mind to without paying fare.

ROBERT. (*with a smile that is half sad*) It's more than that, Andy.

ANDREW. Sure it is. There's always a chance of a good thing coming your way in some of those foreign ports or other. I've heard there are great opportunities for a young fellow with his eyes open in some of those new countries that are just being opened up. (*Jovially*) I'll bet that's what you've been turning over in your mind under all your quietness! (*He slaps his brother on the back with a laugh*) Well, if you get to be a millionaire all of a sudden, call 'round once in a while and I'll pass the plate to you. We could use a lot of money right here on the farm without hurting it any.

ROBERT. (*forced to laugh*) I've never considered that practical side of it for a minute, Andy.

ANDREW. Well, you ought to.

ROBERT. No, I oughtn't. (*Pointing to the horizon—dreamily*) Supposing I was to tell you that it's just Beauty that's calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell of the East which lures me in the books I've read, the need of the freedom of great wide spaces, the joy of wandering on and on—in quest of the secret which is hidden over there, beyond the horizon? Suppose I told you that was the one and only reason for my going?

ANDREW. I should say you were nutty.

ROBERT. (*frowning*) Don't, Andy. I'm serious.

ANDREW. Then you might as well stay here, because we've got all you're looking for right on this farm. There's wide space enough, Lord knows; and you can have all the sea you want by walking a mile down to the beach; and there's plenty of horizon to look at, and beauty enough for anyone, except in the winter. (*He grins*) As for the mystery and spell, I haven't met 'em yet, but they're probably lying around somewheres. I'll have you understand this is a first class farm with all the fixings. (*He laughs*).

ROBERT. (*joining in the laughter in spite of himself*) It's no use talking to you, you chump!

ANDREW. You'd better not say anything to Uncle Dick about spells and things when you're on the ship. He'll likely chuck you overboard for a Jonah. (*He jumps down from fence*) I'd better run along. I've got to wash up some as long as Ruth's Ma is coming over for supper.

ROBERT. (*pointedly—almost bitterly*) And Ruth.

ANDREW. (*confused—looking everywhere except at* ROBERT—*trying to appear unconcerned*) Yes, Ruth'll be staying too. Well, I better hustle, I guess, and—— (*He steps over the ditch to the road while he is talking*).

ROBERT. (*who appears to be fighting some strong inward emotion—impulsively*) Wait a minute, Andy! (*He jumps down from the fence*) There is something I want to—— (*He stops abruptly, biting his lips, his face coloring*).

ANDREW. (*facing him; half-defiantly*) Yes?

ROBERT. (*confusedly*) No—— never mind—— it doesn't matter, it was nothing.

ANDREW. (*after a pause, during which he stares fixedly at*

ROBERT'S *averted face*) Maybe I can guess—— what you were going to say—— but I guess you're right not to talk about it. (*He pulls* ROBERT'S *hand from his side and grips it tensely; the two brothers stand looking into each other's eyes for a minute*) We can't help those things, Rob. (*He turns away, suddenly releasing* ROBERT'S *hand*) You'll be coming along shortly, won't you?

ROBERT. (*dully*) Yes.

ANDREW. See you later, then. (*He walks off down the road to the left.* ROBERT *stares after him for a moment; then climbs to the fence rail again, and looks out over the hills, an expression of deep grief on his face. After a moment or so,* RUTH *enters hurriedly from the left. She is a healthy, blonde, out-of-door girl of twenty, with a graceful, slender figure. Her face, though inclined to roundness, is undeniably pretty, its large eyes of a deep blue set off strikingly by the sun-bronzed complexion. Her small, regular features are marked by a certain strength—an underlying, stubborn fixity of purpose hidden in the frankly-appealing charm of her fresh youthfulness. She wears a simple white dress but no hat*).

RUTH. (*seeing him*) Hello, Rob!

ROBERT. (*startled*) Hello, Ruth!

RUTH. (*jumps the ditch and perches on the fence beside him*) I was looking for you.

ROBERT. (*pointedly*) Andy just left here.

RUTH. I know. I met him on the road a second ago. He told me you were here. (*Tenderly playful*) I wasn't looking for Andy, Smarty, if that's what you mean. I was looking for *you*.

ROBERT. Because I'm going away tomorrow?

RUTH. Because your mother was anxious to have you come home and asked me to look for you. I just wheeled Ma over to your house.

ROBERT. (*perfunctorily*) How is your mother?

RUTH. (*a shadow coming over her face*) She's about the same. She never seems to get any better or any worse. Oh, Rob, I do wish she'd try to make the best of things that can't be helped.

ROBERT. Has she been nagging at you again?

RUTH. (*nods her head, and then breaks forth rebelliously*) She never stops nagging. No matter what I do for her she finds fault. If only Pa was still living—— (*She stops as if ashamed of her outburst*) I suppose I shouldn't complain this way. (*She sighs*) Poor Ma, Lord knows it's hard enough for her. I suppose it's natural to be cross when you're not able ever to walk a step. Oh, I'd like to be going away some place—like you!

ROBERT. It's hard to stay—and equally hard to go, sometimes.

RUTH. There! If I'm not the stupid body! I swore I wasn't going to speak about your trip—until after you'd gone; and there I go, first thing!

ROBERT. Why didn't you want to speak of it?

RUTH. Because I didn't want to spoil this last night you're here. Oh, Rob, I'm going to—we're all going to miss you so awfully. Your mother is going around looking as if she'd burst out crying any minute. You ought to know how I feel. Andy and you and I—why it seems as if we'd always been together.

ROBERT. (*with a wry attempt at a smile*) You and Andy

will still have each other. It'll be harder for me without anyone.

RUTH. But you'll have new sights and new people to take your mind off; while we'll be here with the old, familiar place to remind us every minute of the day. It's a shame you're going—just at this time, in spring, when everything is getting so nice. (*With a sigh*) I oughtn't to talk that way when I know going's the best thing for you. You're bound to find all sorts of opportunities to get on, your father says.

ROBERT. (*heatedly*) I don't give a damn about that! I wouldn't take a voyage across the road for the best opportunity in the world of the kind Pa thinks of. (*He smiles at his own irritation*) Excuse me, Ruth, for getting worked up over it; but Andy gave me an overdose of the practical considerations.

RUTH. (*slowly, puzzled*) Well, then, if it isn't—— (*With sudden intensity*) Oh, Rob, why *do* you want to go?

ROBERT. (*turning to her quickly, in surprise—slowly*) Why do you ask that, Ruth?

RUTH. (*dropping her eyes before his searching glance*) Because—— (*Lamely*) It seems such a shame.

ROBERT. (*insistently*) Why?

RUTH. Oh, because—everything.

ROBERT. I could hardly back out now, even if I wanted to. And I'll be forgotten before you know it.

RUTH. (*indignantly*) You won't! I'll never forget—— (*She stops and turns away to hide her confusion*).

ROBERT. (*softly*) Will you promise me that?

RUTH. (*evasively*) Of course. It's mean of you to think that any of us would forget so easily.

ROBERT. (*disappointedly*) Oh!

RUTH. (*with an attempt at lightness*) But you haven't told me your reason for leaving yet?

ROBERT. (*moodily*) I doubt if you'll understand. It's difficult to explain, even to myself. Either you feel it, or you don't. I can remember being conscious of it first when I was only a kid—you haven't forgotten what a sickly specimen I was then, in those days, have you?

RUTH. (*with a shudder*) Let's not think about them.

ROBERT. You'll have to, to understand. Well, in those days, when Ma was fixing meals, she used to get me out of the way by pushing my chair to the west window and telling me to look out and be quiet. That wasn't hard. I guess I was always quiet.

RUTH. (*compassionately*) Yes, you always were—and you suffering so much, too!

ROBERT. (*musingly*) So I used to stare out over the fields to the hills, out there—(*He points to the horizon*) and somehow after a time I'd forget any pain I was in, and start dreaming. I knew the sea was over beyond those hills,—the folks had told me—and I used to wonder what the sea was like, and try to form a picture of it in my mind. (*With a smile*) There was all the mystery in the world to me then about that—far-off sea—and there still is! It called to me then just as it does now. (*After a slight pause*) And other times my eyes would follow this road, winding off into the distance, toward the hills, as if it, too, was searching for the sea. And I'd promise myself that when I grew up and was strong, I'd follow that road, and it and I would find the sea

together. (*With a smile*) You see, my making this trip is only keeping that promise of long ago.

RUTH (*charmed by his low, musical voice telling the dreams of his childhood*) Yes, I see.

ROBERT. Those were the only happy moments of my life then, dreaming there at the window. I liked to be all alone —those times. I got to know all the different kinds of sunsets by heart. And all those sunsets took place over there— (*He points*) beyond the horizon. So gradually I came to believe that all the wonders of the world happened on the other side of those hills. There was the home of the good fairies who performed beautiful miracles. I believed in fairies then. (*With a smile*) Perhaps I still do believe in them. Anyway, in those days they were real enough, and sometimes I could actually hear them calling to me to come out and play with them, dance with them down the road in the dusk in a game of hide-and-seek to find out where the sun was hiding himself. They sang their little songs to me, songs that told of all the wonderful things they had in their home on the other side of the hills; and they promised to show me all of them, if I'd only come, come! But I couldn't come then, and I used to cry sometimes and Ma would think I was in pain. (*He breaks off suddenly with a laugh*) That's why I'm going now, I suppose. For I can still hear them calling. But the horizon is as far away and as luring as ever. (*He turns to her—softly*) Do you understand now, Ruth?

RUTH. (*spellbound, in a whisper*) Yes.

ROBERT. You feel it then?

RUTH. Yes, yes, I do! (*Unconsciously she snuggles close against his side. His arm steals about her as if he were not*

aware of the action) Oh, Rob, how could I help feeling it? You tell things so beautifully!

ROBERT. (*suddenly realizing that his arm is around her, and that her head is resting on his shoulder, gently takes his arm away.* RUTH, *brought back to herself, is overcome with confusion*) So now you know why I'm going. It's for that reason—that and one other.

RUTH. You've another? Then you must tell me that, too.

ROBERT. (*looking at her searchingly. She drops her eyes before his gaze*) I wonder if I ought to! You'll promise not to be angry—whatever it is?

RUTH. (*softly, her face still averted*) Yes, I promise.

ROBERT. (*simply*) I love you. That's the other reason.

RUTH. (*hiding her face in her hands*) Oh, Rob!

ROBERT. I wasn't going to tell you, but I feel I have to. It can't matter now that I'm going so far away, and for so long—perhaps forever. I've loved you all these years, but the realization never came 'til I agreed to go away with Uncle Dick. Then I thought of leaving you, and the pain of that thought revealed to me in a flash—that I loved you, had loved you as long as I could remember. (*He gently pulls one of* RUTH'S *hands away from her face*) You mustn't mind my telling you this, Ruth. I realize how impossible it all is—and I understand; for the revelation of my own love seemed to open my eyes to the love of others. I saw Andy's love for you—and I knew that you must love him.

RUTH. (*breaking out stormily*) I don't! I don't love Andy! I don't! (ROBERT *stares at her in stupid astonishment.* RUTH *weeps hysterically*) Whatever—put such a fool notion into—into your head? (*She suddenly throws her arms about his neck*

and hides her head on his shoulder) Oh, Rob! Don't go away! Please! You mustn't, now! You can't! I won't let you! It'd break my—my heart!

ROBERT. (*The expression of stupid bewilderment giving way to one of overwhelming joy. He presses her close to him—slowly and tenderly*) Do you mean that—that you love me?

RUTH. (*sobbing*) Yes, yes—of course I do—what d'you s'pose? (*She lifts up her head and looks into his eyes with a tremulous smile*) You stupid thing! (*He kisses her*) I've loved you right along.

ROBERT. (*mystified*) But you and Andy were always together!

RUTH. Because you never seemed to want to go any place with me. You were always reading an old book, and not paying any attention to me. I was too proud to let you see I cared because I thought the year you had away to college had made you stuck-up, and you thought yourself too educated to waste any time on me.

ROBERT. (*kissing her*) And I was thinking—— (*With a laugh*) What fools we've both been!

RUTH. (*overcome by a sudden fear*) You won't go away on the trip, will you, Rob? You'll tell them you can't go on account of me, won't you? You can't go now! You can't!

ROBERT. (*bewildered*) Perhaps—you can come too.

RUTH. Oh, Rob, don't be so foolish. You know I can't. Who'd take care of ma? Don't you see I couldn't go—on her account? (*She clings to him imploringly*) Please don't go—not now. Tell them you've decided not to. They won't mind. I know your mother and father'll be glad. They'll all be. They don't want you to go so far away from them. Please, Rob!

We'll be so happy here together where it's natural and we know things. Please tell me you won't go!

ROBERT. (*face to face with a definite, final decision, betrays the conflict going on within him*) But—Ruth—I—Uncle Dick——

RUTH. He won't mind when he knows it's for your happiness to stay. How could he? (*As* ROBERT *remains silent she bursts into sobs again*) Oh, Rob! And you said—you loved me!

ROBERT. (*conquered by this appeal—an irrevocable decision in his voice*) I won't go, Ruth. I promise you. There! Don't cry! (*He presses her to him, stroking her hair tenderly. After a pause he speaks with happy hopefulness*) Perhaps after all Andy was right—righter than he knew—when he said I could find all the things I was seeking for here, at home on the farm. I think love must have been the secret—the secret that called to me from over the world's rim—the secret beyond every horizon; and when I did not come, it came to me. (*He clasps* RUTH *to him fiercely*) Oh, Ruth, our love is sweeter than any distant dream! (*He kisses her passionately and steps to the ground, lifting* RUTH *in his arms and carrying her to the road where he puts her down*).

RUTH. (*with a happy laugh*) My, but you're strong!

ROBERT. Come! We'll go and tell them at once.

RUTH. (*dismayed*) Oh, no, don't, Rob, not 'til after I've gone. There'd be bound to be such a scene with them all together.

ROBERT. (*kissing her—gayly*) As you like—little Miss Common Sense!

RUTH. Let's go, then. (*She takes his hand, and they start*

to go off left. ROBERT *suddenly stops and turns as though for a last look at the hills and the dying sunset flush).*

ROBERT. (*looking upward and pointing*) See! The first star. (*He bends down and kisses her tenderly*) *Our* star!

RUTH. (*in a soft murmur*) Yes. Our very own star. (*They stand for a moment looking up at it, their arms around each other. Then* RUTH *takes his hand again and starts to lead him away*) Come, Rob, let's go. (*His eyes are fixed again on the horizon as he half turns to follow her.* RUTH *urges*) We'll be late for supper, Rob.

ROBERT. (*shakes his head impatiently, as though he were throwing off some disturbing thought—with a laugh*) All right. We'll run then. Come on! (*They run off laughing as*

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT ONE

Scene Two

The sitting room of the Mayo farm house about nine o'clock the same night. On the left, two windows looking out on the fields. Against the wall between the windows, an old-fashioned walnut desk. In the left corner, rear, a sideboard with a mirror. In the rear wall to the right of the sideboard, a window looking out on the road. Next to the window a door leading out into the yard. Farther right, a black horse-hair sofa, and another door opening on a bedroom. In the corner, a straight-backed chair. In the right wall, near the middle, an open doorway leading to the kitchen. Farther forward a double-heater stove with coal scuttle, etc. In the center of the newly carpeted floor, an oak dining-room table with a red cover. In the center of the table, a large oil reading lamp. Four chairs, three rockers with crocheted tidies on their backs, and one straight-backed, are placed about the table. The walls are papered a dark red with a scrolly-figured pattern.

Everything in the room is clean, well-kept, and in its exact place, yet there is no suggestion of primness about the whole. Rather the atmosphere is one of the orderly comfort of a simple, hard-earned prosperity, enjoyed and maintained by the family as a unit.

JAMES MAYO, *his wife, her brother,* CAPTAIN DICK SCOTT, *and* ANDREW *are discovered.* MAYO *is his son* ANDREW *over again in body and face—an* ANDREW *sixty-five years old with a short,*

square, white beard. MRS. MAYO *is a slight, round-faced, rather prim-looking woman of fifty-five who had once been a school teacher. The labors of a farmer's wife have bent but not broken her, and she retains a certain refinement of movement and expression foreign to the* MAYO *part of the family. Whatever of resemblance* ROBERT *has to his parents may be traced to her. Her brother, the* CAPTAIN, *is short and stocky, with a weather-beaten, jovial face and a white mustache—a typical old salt, loud of voice and given to gesture. He is fifty-eight years old.*

JAMES MAYO *sits in front of the table. He wears spectacles, and a farm journal which he has been reading lies in his lap.* THE CAPTAIN *leans forward from a chair in the rear, his hands on the table in front of him.* ANDREW *is tilted back on the straight-backed chair to the left, his chin sunk forward on his chest, staring at the carpet, preoccupied and frowning.*

As the Curtain rises the CAPTAIN *is just finishing the relation of some sea episode. The others are pretending an interest which is belied by the absent-minded expressions on their faces.*

THE CAPTAIN. (*chuckling*) And that mission woman, she hails me on the dock as I was acomin' ashore, and she says—with her silly face all screwed up serious as judgment—"Captain," she says, "would you be so kind as to tell me where the sea-gulls sleeps at nights?" Blow me if them warn't her exact words! (*He slaps the table with the palm of his hands and laughs loudly. The others force smiles*) Ain't that just like a fool woman's question? And I looks at her serious as I could, "Ma'm," says I, "I couldn't rightly answer that question. I ain't never seed a sea-gull in his bunk yet. The next time I hears one snorin'," I says, "I'll make a note of where he's turned in, and

write you a letter 'bout it." And then she calls me a fool real spiteful and tacks away from me quick. (*He laughs again uproariously*) So I got rid of her that way. (*The others smile but immediately relapse into expressions of gloom again*).

MRS. MAYO. (*absent-mindedly—feeling that she has to say something*) But when it comes to that, where *do* sea-gulls sleep, Dick?

SCOTT. (*slapping the table*) Ho! Ho! Listen to her, James. 'Nother one! Well, if that don't beat all hell—'scuse me for cussin', Kate.

MAYO. (*with a twinkle in his eyes*) They unhitch their wings, Katey, and spreads 'em out on a wave for a bed.

SCOTT. And then they tells the fish to whistle to 'em when it's time to turn out. Ho! Ho!

MRS. MAYO. (*with a forced smile*) You men folks are too smart to live, aren't you? (*She resumes her knitting.* MAYO *pretends to read his paper;* ANDREW *stares at the floor*).

SCOTT. (*looks from one to the other of them with a puzzled air. Finally he is unable to bear the thick silence a minute longer, and blurts out*): You folks look as if you was settin' up with a corpse. (*With exaggerated concern*) God A'mighty, there ain't anyone dead, be there?

MAYO. (*sharply*) Don't play the dunce, Dick! You know as well as we do there ain't no great cause to be feelin' chipper.

SCOTT. (*argumentatively*) And there ain't no cause to be wearin' mourning, either, I can make out.

MRS. MAYO. (*indignantly*) How can you talk that way, Dick Scott, when you're taking our Robbie away from us, in the middle of the night, you might say, just to get on that old

boat of yours on time! I think you might wait until morning when he's had his breakfast.

SCOTT. (*appealing to the others hopelessly*) Ain't that a woman's way o' seein' things for you? God A'mighty, Kate, I can't give orders to the tide that it's got to be high just when it suits me to have it. I ain't gettin' no fun out o' missin' sleep and leavin' here at six bells myself. (*Protestingly*) And the *Sunda* ain't an old ship—leastways, not very old—and she's good's she ever was.

MRS. MAYO. (*her lips trembling*) I wish Robbie weren't going.

MAYO. (*looking at her over his glasses—consolingly*) There, Katey!

MRS. MAYO. (*rebelliously*) Well, I *do* wish he wasn't!

SCOTT. You shouldn't be taking it so hard, 's far as I kin see. This vige'll make a man of him. I'll see to it he learns how to navigate, 'n' study for a mate's c'tificate right off—and it'll give him a trade for the rest of his life, if he wants to travel.

MRS. MAYO. But I don't want him to travel all his life. You've got to see he comes home when this trip is over. Then he'll be all well, and he'll want to—to marry—(ANDREW *sits forward in his chair with an abrupt movement*)—and settle down right here. (*She stares down at the knitting in her lap—after a pause*) I never realized how hard it was going to be for me to have Robbie go—or I wouldn't have considered it a minute.

SCOTT. It ain't no good goin' on that way, Kate, now it's all settled.

MRS. MAYO. (*on the verge of tears*) It's all right for *you* to talk. You've never had any children. You don't know

what it means to be parted from them—and Robbie my youngest, too. (ANDREW *frowns and fidgets in his chair*).

ANDREW. (*suddenly turning to them*) There's one thing none of you seem to take into consideration—that Rob wants to go. He's dead set on it. He's been dreaming over this trip ever since it was first talked about. It wouldn't be fair to him not to have him go. (*A sudden uneasiness seems to strike him*) At least, not if he still feels the same way about it he did when he was talking to me this evening.

MAYO. (*with an air of decision*) Andy's right, Katey. That ends all argyment, you can see that. (*Looking at his big silver watch*) Wonder what's happened to Robert? He's been gone long enough to wheel the widder to home, certain. He can't be out dreamin' at the stars his last night.

MRS. MAYO. (*a bit reproachfully*) Why didn't you wheel Mrs. Atkins back tonight, Andy? You usually do when she and Ruth come over.

ANDREW. (*avoiding her eyes*) I thought maybe Robert wanted to tonight. He offered to go right away when they were leaving.

MRS. MAYO. He only wanted to be polite.

ANDREW. (*gets to his feet*) Well, he'll be right back, I guess. (*He turns to his father*) Guess I'll go take a look at the black cow, Pa—see if she's ailing any.

MAYO. Yes—better had, son. (ANDREW *goes into the kitchen on the right*).

SCOTT. (*as he goes out—in a low tone*) There's the boy that would make a good, strong sea-farin' man—if he'd a mind to.

MAYO. (*sharply*) Don't you put no such fool notions in Andy's head, Dick—or you 'n' me's goin' to fall out. (*Then he*

smiles) You couldn't tempt him, no ways. Andy's a Mayo bred in the bone, and he's a born farmer, and a damn good one, too. He'll live and die right here on this farm, like I expect to. (*With proud confidence*) And he'll make this one of the slickest, best-payin' farms in the state, too, afore he gits through!

SCOTT. Seems to me it's a pretty slick place right now.

MAYO. (*shaking his head*) It's too small. We need more land to make it amount to much, and we ain't got the capital to buy it. (ANDREW *enters from the kitchen. His hat is on, and he carries a lighted lantern in his hand. He goes to the door in the rear leading out*).

ANDREW. (*opens the door and pauses*) Anything else you can think of to be done, Pa?

MAYO. No, nothin' I know of. (ANDREW *goes out, shutting the door*).

MRS. MAYO. (*after a pause*) What's come over Andy tonight, I wonder? He acts so strange.

MAYO. He does seem sort o' glum and out of sorts. It's 'count o' Robert leavin', I s'pose. (*To* SCOTT) Dick, you wouldn't believe how them boys o' mine sticks together. They ain't like most brothers. They've been thick as thieves all their lives, with nary a quarrel I kin remember.

SCOTT. No need to tell me that. I can see how they take to each other.

MRS. MAYO. (*pursuing her train of thought*) Did you notice, James, how queer everyone was at supper? Robert seemed stirred up about something; and Ruth was so flustered and giggly; and Andy sat there dumb, looking as if he'd lost his best friend; and all of them only nibbled at their food.

MAYO. Guess they was all thinkin' about tomorrow, same as us.

MRS. MAYO. (*shaking her head*) No. I'm afraid somethin's happened—somethin' else.

MAYO. You mean—'bout Ruth?

MRS. MAYO. Yes.

MAYO. (*after a pause—frowning*) I hope her and Andy ain't had a serious fallin'-out. I always sorter hoped they'd hitch up together sooner or later. What d'you say, Dick? Don't you think them two'd pair up well?

SCOTT. (*nodding his head approvingly*) A sweet, wholesome couple they'd make.

MAYO. It'd be a good thing for Andy in more ways than one. I ain't what you'd call calculatin' generally, and I b'lieve in lettin' young folks run their affairs to suit themselves; but there's advantages for both o' them in this match you can't overlook in reason. The Atkins farm is right next to ourn. Jined together they'd make a jim-dandy of a place, with plenty o' room to work in. And bein' a widder with only a daughter, and laid up all the time to boot, Mrs. Atkins can't do nothin' with the place as it ought to be done. She needs a man, a first-class farmer, to take hold o' things; and Andy's just the one.

MRS. MAYO. (*abruptly*) I don't think Ruth loves Andy.

MAYO. You don't? Well, maybe a woman's eyes is sharper in such things, but—they're always together. And if she don't love him now, she'll likely come around to it in time. (*As* MRS. MAYO *shakes her head*) You seem mighty fixed in your opinion, Katey. How d'you know?

MRS. MAYO. It's just—what I feel.

MAYO. (*a light breaking over him*) You don't mean to say

—(MRS. MAYO *nods.* MAYO *chuckles scornfully*) Shucks! I'm losin' my respect for your eyesight, Katey. Why, Robert ain't got no time for Ruth, 'cept as a friend!

MRS. MAYO. (*warningly*) Sss-h-h! (*The door from the yard opens, and* ROBERT *enters. He is smiling happily, and humming a song to himself, but as he comes into the room an undercurrent of nervous uneasiness manifests itself in his bearing*).

MAYO. So here you be at last! (ROBERT *comes forward and sits on* ANDY'S *chair.* MAYO *smiles slyly at his wife*) What have you been doin' all this time—countin' the stars to see if they all come out right and proper?

ROBERT. There's only one I'll ever look for any more, Pa.

MAYO. (*reproachfully*) You might've even not wasted time lookin' for that one—your last night.

MRS. MAYO. (*as if she were speaking to a child*) You ought to have worn your coat a sharp night like this, Robbie.

SCOTT. (*disgustedly*) God A'mighty, Kate, you treat Robert as if he was one year old!

MRS. MAYO. (*notices* ROBERT'S *nervous uneasiness*) You look all worked up over something, Robbie. What is it?

ROBERT. (*swallowing hard, looks quickly from one to the other of them—then begins determinedly*) Yes, there *is* something—something I must tell you—all of you. (*As he begins to talk* ANDREW *enters quietly from the rear, closing the door behind him, and setting the lighted lantern on the floor. He remains standing by the door, his arms folded, listening to* ROBERT *with a repressed expression of pain on his face.* ROBERT *is so much taken up with what he is going to say that he does not notice* ANDREW'S *presence.*) Something I discovered only this evening—very beautiful and wonderful—something I did not

take into consideration previously because I hadn't dared to hope that such happiness could ever come to me. (*Appealingly*) You must all remember that fact, won't you?

MAYO. (*frowning*) Let's get to the point, son.

ROBERT. (*with a trace of defiance*) Well, the point is this, Pa: I'm not going—I mean—I can't go tomorrow with Uncle Dick—or at any future time, either.

MRS. MAYO. (*with a sharp sigh of joyful relief*) Oh, Robbie, I'm so glad!

MAYO. (*astounded*) You ain't serious, be you, Robert? (*Severely*) Seems to me it's a pretty late hour in the day for you to be upsettin' all your plans so sudden!

ROBERT. I asked you to remember that until this evening I didn't know myself. I had never dared to dream——

MAYO. (*irritably*) What is this foolishness you're talkin' of?

ROBERT. (*flushing*) Ruth told me this evening that—she loved me. It was after I'd confessed I loved her. I told her I hadn't been conscious of my love until after the trip had been arranged, and I realized it would mean—leaving her. That was the truth. I *didn't* know until then. (*As if justifying himself to the others*) I hadn't intended telling her anything but—suddenly—I felt I must. I didn't think it would matter, because I was going away. And I thought she loved—someone else. (*Slowly—his eyes shining*) And then she cried and said it was I she'd loved all the time, but I hadn't seen it.

MRS. MAYO. (*rushes over and throws her arms about him*) I knew it! I was just telling your father when you came in—and, Oh, Robbie, I'm so happy you're not going!

ROBERT. (*kissing her*) I knew you'd be glad, Ma.

MAYO. (*bewilderedly*) Well, I'll be damned! You do beat

all for gettin' folks' minds all tangled up, Robert. And Ruth too! Whatever got into her of a sudden? Why, I was thinkin'——

MRS. MAYO. (*hurriedly—in a tone of warning*) Never mind what you were thinking, James. It wouldn't be any use telling us that now. (*Meaningly*) And what you were hoping for turns out just the same almost, doesn't it?

MAYO. (*thoughtfully—beginning to see this side of the argument*) Yes; I suppose you're right, Katey. (*Scratching his head in puzzlement*) But how it ever come about! It do beat anything ever I heard. (*Finally he gets up with a sheepish grin and walks over to* ROBERT) We're glad you ain't goin', your Ma and I, for we'd have missed you terrible, that's certain and sure; and we're glad you've found happiness. Ruth's a fine girl and'll make a good wife to you.

ROBERT. (*much moved*) Thank you, Pa. (*He grips his father's hand in his*).

ANDREW. (*his face tense and drawn comes forward and holds out his hand, forcing a smile*) I guess it's my turn to offer congratulations, isn't it?

ROBERT. (*with a startled cry when his brother appears before him so suddenly*) Andy! (*Confused*) Why—I—I didn't see you. Were you here when——

ANDREW. I heard everything you said; and here's wishing you every happiness, you and Ruth. You both deserve the best there is.

ROBERT. (*taking his hand*) Thanks, Andy, it's fine of you to—— (*His voice dies away as he sees the pain in* ANDREW'S *eyes*).

ANDREW. (*giving his brother's hand a final grip*) Good luck

to you both! (*He turns away and goes back to the rear where he bends over the lantern, fumbling with it to hide his emotion from the others*).

MRS. MAYO. (*to the* CAPTAIN, *who has been too flabbergasted by* ROBERT'S *decision to say a word*) What's the matter, Dick? Aren't you going to congratulate Robbie?

SCOTT. (*embarrassed*) Of course I be! (*He gets to his feet and shakes* ROBERT'S *hand, muttering a vague*) Luck to you, boy. (*He stands beside* ROBERT *as if he wanted to say something more but doesn't know how to go about it*).

ROBERT. Thanks, Uncle Dick.

SCOTT. So you're not acomin' on the *Sunda* with me? (*His voice indicates disbelief*).

ROBERT. I can't, Uncle—not now. I wouldn't miss it for anything else in the world under any other circumstances. (*He sighs unconsciously*) But you see I've found—a bigger dream. (*Then with joyous high spirits*) I want you all to understand one thing—I'm not going to be a loafer on your hands any longer. This means the beginning of a new life for me in every way. I'm going to settle right down and take a real interest in the farm, and do my share. I'll prove to you, Pa, that I'm as good a Mayo as you are—or Andy, when I want to be.

MAYO. (*kindly but skeptically*) That's the right spirit, Robert. Ain't none of us doubts your willin'ness, but you ain't never learned——

ROBERT. Then I'm going to start learning right away, and you'll teach me, won't you?

MAYO. (*mollifyingly*) Of course I will, boy, and be glad to, only you'd best go easy at first.

SCOTT. (*who has listened to this conversation in mingled*

consternation and amazement) You don't mean to tell me you're goin' to let him stay, do you, James?

MAYO. Why, things bein' as they be, Robert's free to do as he's a mind to.

MRS. MAYO. *Let him!* The very idea!

SCOTT. (*more and more ruffled*) Then all I got to say is, you're a soft, weak-willed critter to be permittin' a boy—and women, too—to be layin' your course for you wherever they damn pleases.

MAYO. (*slyly amused*) It's just the same with me as 'twas with you, Dick. You can't order the tides on the seas to suit you, and I ain't pretendin' I can reg'late love for young folks.

SCOTT. (*scornfully*) Love! They ain't old enough to know love when they sight it! Love! I'm ashamed of you, Robert, to go lettin' a little huggin' and kissin' in the dark spile your chances to make a man out o' yourself. It ain't common sense—no siree, it ain't—not by a hell of a sight! (*He pounds the table with his fists in exasperation*).

MRS. MAYO. (*laughing provokingly at her brother*) A fine one you are to be talking about love, Dick—an old cranky bachelor like you. Goodness sakes!

SCOTT. (*exasperated by their joking*) I've never been a damn fool like most, if that's what you're steerin' at.

MRS. MAYO. (*tauntingly*) Sour grapes, aren't they, Dick? (*She laughs.* ROBERT *and his father chuckle.* SCOTT *sputters with annoyance*) Good gracious, Dick, you do act silly, flying into a temper over nothing.

SCOTT. (*indignantly*) Nothin'! You talk as if I wasn't concerned nohow in this here business. Seems to me I've got a right to have my say. Ain't I made all arrangements with the

owners and stocked up with some special grub all on Robert's account?

ROBERT. You've been fine, Uncle Dick; and I appreciate it. Truly.

MAYO. 'Course; we all does, Dick.

SCOTT. (*unplacated*) I've been countin' sure on havin' Robert for company on this vige—to sorta talk to and show things to, and teach, kinda, and I got my mind so set on havin' him I'm goin' to be double lonesome this vige. (*He pounds on the table, attempting to cover up this confession of weakness*) Darn all this silly lovin' business, anyway. (*Irritably*) But all this talk ain't tellin' me what I'm to do with that sta'b'd cabin I fixed up. It's all painted white, an' a bran new mattress on the bunk, 'n' new sheets 'n' blankets 'n' things. And Chips built in a book-case so's Robert could take his books along—with a slidin' bar fixed across't it, mind, so's they couldn't fall out no matter how she rolled. (*With excited consternation*) What d'you suppose my officers is goin' to think when there's no one comes aboard to occupy that sta'b'd cabin? And the men what did the work on it—what'll *they* think? (*He shakes his finger indignantly*) They're liable as not to suspicion it was a *woman* I'd planned to ship along, and that she gave me the go-by at the last moment! (*He wipes his perspiring brow in anguish at this thought*). Gawd A'mighty! They're only lookin' to have the laugh on me for something like that. They're liable to b'lieve anything, those fellers is!

MAYO. (*with a wink*) Then there's nothing to it but for you to get right out and hunt up a wife somewheres for that spick 'n' span cabin. She'll have to be a pretty one, too, to match it. (*He looks at his watch with exaggerated concern*) You ain't got much time to find her, Dick.

SCOTT. (*as the others smile—sulkily*) You kin go to thunder, Jim Mayo!

ANDREW. (*comes forward from where he has been standing by the door, rear, brooding. His face is set in a look of grim determination*) You needn't worry about that spare cabin, Uncle Dick, if you've a mind to take me in Robert's place.

ROBERT. (*turning to him quickly*) Andy! (*He sees at once the fixed resolve in his brother's eyes, and realizes immediately the reason for it—in consternation*) Andy, you mustn't!

ANDREW. You've made your decision, Rob, and now I've made mine. You're out of this, remember.

ROBERT. (*hurt by his brother's tone*) But Andy——

ANDREW. Don't interfere, Rob—that's all I ask. (*Turning to his uncle*) You haven't answered my question, Uncle Dick.

SCOTT. (*clearing his throat, with an uneasy side glance at* JAMES MAYO *who is staring at his elder son as if he thought he had suddenly gone mad*) O' course, I'd be glad to have you, Andy.

ANDREW. It's settled then. I can pack the little I want to take in a few minutes.

MRS. MAYO. Don't be a fool, Dick. Andy's only joking you.

SCOTT. (*disgruntedly*) It's hard to tell who's jokin' and who's not in this house.

ANDREW. (*firmly*) I'm not joking, Uncle Dick (*As* SCOTT *looks at him uncertainly*) You needn't be afraid I'll go back on my word.

ROBERT. (*hurt by the insinuation he feels in* ANDREW'S *tone*) Andy! That isn't fair!

MAYO. (*frowning*) Seems to me this ain't no subject to joke over—not for Andy.

ANDREW. (*facing his father*) I agree with you, Pa, and I

tell you again, once and for all, that I've made up my mind to go.

MAYO. (*dumbfounded—unable to doubt the determination in* ANDREW'S *voice—helplessly*) But why, son? Why?

ANDREW. (*evasively*) I've always wanted to go.

ROBERT. Andy!

ANDREW. (*half angrily*) You shut up, Rob! (*Turning to his father again*) I didn't ever mention it because as long as Rob was going I knew it was no use; but now Rob's staying on here, there isn't any reason for me not to go.

MAYO. (*breathing hard*) No reason? Can you stand there and say that to me, Andrew?

MRS. MAYO. (*hastily—seeing the gathering storm*) He doesn't mean a word of it, James.

MAYO. (*making a gesture to her to keep silence*) Let me talk, Katey. (*In a more kindly tone*) What's come over you so sudden, Andy? You know's well as I do that it wouldn't be fair o' you to run off at a moment's notice right now when we're up to our necks in hard work.

ANDREW. (*avoiding his eyes*) Rob'll hold his end up as soon as he learns.

MAYO. Robert was never cut out for a farmer, and you was.

ANDREW. You can easily get a man to do my work.

MAYO. (*restraining his anger with an effort*) It sounds strange to hear you, Andy, that I always thought had good sense, talkin' crazy like that (*Scornfully*) Get a man to take your place! You ain't been workin' here for no hire, Andy, that you kin give me your notice to quit like you've done. The farm is your'n as well as mine. You've always worked on it with that understanding; and what you're sayin' you intend doin' is just skulkin' out o' your rightful responsibility.

ANDREW. (*looking at the floor—simply*) I'm sorry, Pa.

(*After a slight pause*) It's no use talking any more about it.

MRS. MAYO. (*in relief*) There! I knew Andy'd come to his senses!

ANDREW. Don't get the wrong idea, Ma. I'm not backing out.

MAYO. You mean you're goin' in spite of—everythin'?

ANDREW. Yes. I'm going. I've got to. (*He looks at his father defiantly*) I feel I oughn't to miss this chance to go out into the world and see things, and—I want to go.

MAYO. (*with bitter scorn*) So—you want to go out into the world and see thin's! (*His voice raised and quivering with anger*) I never thought I'd live to see the day when a son o' mine 'd look me in the face and tell a bare-faced lie! (*Bursting out*) You're a liar, Andy Mayo, and a mean one to boot!

MRS. MAYO. James!

ROBERT. Pa!

SCOTT. Steady there, Jim!

MAYO. (*waving their protests aside*) He is and he knows it.

ANDREW. (*his face flushed*) I won't argue with you, Pa. You can think as badly of me as you like.

MAYO. (*shaking his finger at* ANDY, *in a cold rage*) You know I'm speakin' truth—that's why you're afraid to argy! You lie when you say you want to go 'way—and see thin's! You ain't got no likin' in the world to go. I've watched you grow up, and I know your ways, and they're my ways. You're runnin' against your own nature, and you're goin' to be a'mighty sorry for it if you do. 'S if I didn't know your real reason for runnin' away! And runnin' away's the only words to fit it. You're runnin' away 'cause you're put out and riled 'cause your own brother's got Ruth 'stead o' you, and——

ANDREW. (*his face crimson—tensely*) Stop, Pa! I won't stand hearing that—not even from you!

MRS. MAYO. (*rushing to* ANDY *and putting her arms about him protectingly*) Don't mind him, Andy dear. He don't mean a word he's saying! (ROBERT *stands rigidly, his hands clenched, his face contracted by pain.* SCOTT *sits dumbfounded and open-mouthed.* ANDREW *soothes his mother who is on the verge of tears*).

MAYO. (*in angry triumph*) It's the truth, Andy Mayo! And you ought to be bowed in shame to think of it!

ROBERT. (*protestingly*) Pa!

MRS. MAYO. (*coming from* ANDREW *to his father; puts her hands on his shoulders as though to try and push him back in the chair from which he has risen*) Won't you be still, James? Please won't you?

MAYO. (*looking at* ANDREW *over his wife's shoulder—stubbornly*) The truth—God's truth!

MRS. MAYO. Sh-h-h! (*She tries to put a finger across his lips, but he twists his head away*).

ANDREW. (*who has regained control over himself*) You're wrong, Pa, it isn't truth. (*With defiant assertiveness*) I don't love Ruth. I never loved her, and the thought of such a thing never entered my head.

MAYO. (*with an angry snort of disbelief*) Hump! You're pilin' lie on lie!

ANDREW. (*losing his temper—bitterly*) I suppose it'd be hard for you to explain anyone's wanting to leave this blessed farm except for some outside reason like that. But I'm sick and tired of it—whether you want to believe me or not—and that's why I'm glad to get a chance to move on.

ROBERT. Andy! Don't! You're only making it worse.

ANDREW. (*sulkily*) I don't care. I've done my share of work here. I've earned my right to quit when I want to.

(*Suddenly overcome with anger and grief; with rising intensity*) I'm sick and tired of the whole damn business. I hate the farm and every inch of ground in it. I'm sick of digging in the dirt and sweating in the sun like a slave without getting a word of thanks for it. (*Tears of rage starting to his eyes—hoarsely*) I'm through, through for good and all; and if Uncle Dick won't take me on his ship, I'll find another. I'll get away somewhere, somehow.

MRS. MAYO. (*in a frightened voice*) Don't you answer him, James. He doesn't know what he's saying. Don't say a word to him 'til he's in his right senses again. Please James, don't——

MAYO. (*pushes her away from him; his face is drawn and pale with the violence of his passion. He glares at* ANDREW *as if he hated him*) You dare to—you dare to speak like that to me? You talk like that 'bout this farm—the Mayo farm—where you was born—you—you—— (*He clenches his fist above his head and advances threateningly on* ANDREW) You damned whelp!

MRS. MAYO. (*with a shriek*) James! (*She covers her face with her hands and sinks weakly into* MAYO'S *chair.* ANDREW *remains standing motionless, his face pale and set*).

SCOTT. (*starting to his feet and stretching his arms across the table toward* MAYO) Easy there, Jim!

ROBERT. (*throwing himself between father and brother*) Stop! Are you mad?

MAYO. (*grabs* ROBERT'S *arm and pushes him aside—then stands for a moment gasping for breath before* ANDREW. *He points to the door with a shaking finger*) Yes—go!—go!—You're no son o' mine—no son o' mine! You can go to hell if

you want to! Don't let me find you here—in the mornin'—or—or—I'll *throw* you out!

ROBERT. Pa! For God's sake! (MRS. MAYO *bursts into noisy sobbing*).

MAYO. (*he gulps convulsively and glares at* ANDREW) You go—tomorrow mornin'—and by God—don't come back—don't dare come back—by God, not while I'm livin'—or I'll—I'll——(*He shakes over his muttered threat and strides toward the door rear, right*).

MRS. MAYO. (*rising and throwing her arms around him—hysterically*) James! James! Where are you going?

MAYO. (*incoherently*) I'm goin'—to bed, Katey. It's late, Katey—it's late. (*He goes out*).

MRS. MAYO. (*following him, pleading hysterically*) James! Take back what you've said to Andy. James! (*She follows him out.* ROBERT *and the* CAPTAIN *stare after them with horrified eyes.* ANDREW *stands rigidly looking straight in front of him, his fists clenched at his sides*).

SCOTT. (*the first to find his voice—with an explosive sigh*) Well, if he ain't the devil himself when he's roused! You oughtn't to have talked to him that way, Andy 'bout the damn farm, knowin' how touchy he is about it. (*With another sigh*) Well, you won't mind what he's said in anger. He'll be sorry for it when he's calmed down a bit.

ANDREW. (*in a dead voice*) You don't know him. (*Defiantly*) What's said is said and can't be unsaid; and I've chosen.

ROBERT. (*with violent protest*) Andy! You can't go! This is all so stupid—and terrible!

ANDREW. (*coldly*) I'll talk to you in a minute, Rob. (*Crushed*

by his brother's attitude ROBERT *sinks down into a chair, holding his head in his hands*).

SCOTT. (*comes and slaps* ANDREW *on the back*) I'm damned glad you're shippin' on, Andy. I like your spirit, and the way you spoke up to him. (*Lowering his voice to a cautious whisper*) The sea's the place for a young feller like you that isn't half dead 'n' alive. (*He gives* ANDY *a final approving slap*) You 'n' me 'll get along like twins, see if we don't. I'm goin' aloft to turn in. Don't forget to pack your dunnage. And git some sleep, if you kin. We'll want to sneak out extra early b'fore they're up. It'll do away with more argyments. Robert can drive us down to the town, and bring back the team. (*He goes to the door in the rear, left*) Well, good night.

ANDREW. Good night. (SCOTT *goes out. The two brothers remain silent for a moment. Then* ANDREW *comes over to his brother and puts a hand on his back. He speaks in a low voice, full of feeling*) Buck up, Rob. It ain't any use crying over spilt milk; and it'll all turn out for the best—let's hope. It couldn't be helped—what's happened.

ROBERT. (*wildly*) But it's a lie, Andy, a lie!

ANDREW. Of course it's a lie. You know it and I know it,—but that's all ought to know it.

ROBERT. Pa'll never forgive you. Oh, the whole affair is so senseless—and tragic. Why did you think you must go away?

ANDREW. You know better than to ask that. You know why. (*Fiercely*) I can wish you and Ruth all the good luck in the world, and I do, and I mean it; but you can't expect me to stay around here and watch you two together, day after day—and me alone. I couldn't stand it—not after all the plans

I'd made to happen on this place thinking—— (*his voice breaks*) thinking she cared for me.

ROBERT. (*putting a hand on his brother's arm*) God! It's horrible! I feel so guilty—to think that I should be the cause of your suffering, after we've been such pals all our lives. If I could have foreseen what'd happen, I swear to you I'd have never said a word to Ruth. I swear I wouldn't have, Andy!

ANDREW. I know you wouldn't; and that would've been worse, for Ruth would've suffered then. (*He pats his brother's shoulder*) It's best as it is. It had to be, and I've got to stand the gaff, that's all. Pa'll see how I felt—after a time. (*As* ROBERT *shakes his head*)—and if he don't—well, it can't be helped.

ROBERT. But think of Ma! God, Andy, you can't go! You can't!

ANDREW. (*fiercely*) I've got to go—to get away! I've got to, I tell you. I'd go crazy here, bein' reminded every second of the day what a fool I'd made of myself. I've got to get away and try and forget, if I can. And I'd hate the farm if I stayed, hate it for bringin' things back. I couldn't take interest in the work any more, work with no purpose in sight. Can't you see what a hell it'd be? You love her too, Rob. Put yourself in my place, and remember I haven't stopped loving her, and couldn't if I was to stay. Would that be fair to you or to her? Put yourself in my place. (*He shakes his brother fiercely by the shoulder*) What'd you do then? Tell me the truth! You love her. What'd you do?

ROBERT. (*chokingly*) I'd—I'd go, Andy! (*He buries his face in his hands with a shuddering sob*) God!

ANDREW. (*seeming to relax suddenly all over his body—in*

a low, steady voice) Then you know why I got to go; and there's nothing more to be said.

ROBERT. (*in a frenzy of rebellion*) Why did this have to happen to us? It's damnable! (*He looks about him wildly, as if his vengeance were seeking the responsible fate*).

ANDREW. (*soothingly—again putting his hands on his brother's shoulder*) It's no use fussing any more, Rob. It's done. (*Forcing a smile*) I guess Ruth's got a right to have who she likes. She made a good choice—and God bless her for it!

ROBERT. Andy! Oh, I wish I could tell you half I feel of how fine you are!

ANDREW. (*interrupting him quickly*) Shut up! Let's go to bed. I've got to be up long before sun-up. You, too, if you're going to drive us down.

ROBERT. Yes. Yes.

ANDREW. (*turning down the lamp*) And I've got to pack yet. (*He yawns with utter weariness*) I'm as tired as if I'd been plowing twenty-four hours at a stretch. (*Dully*) I feel —dead. (ROBERT *covers his face again with his hands.* ANDREW *shakes his head as if to get rid of his thoughts, and continues with a poor attempt at cheery briskness*) I'm going to douse the light. Come on. (*He slaps his brother on the back.* ROBERT *does not move.* ANDREW *bends over and blows out the lamp. His voice comes from the darkness*) Don't sit there mourning, Rob. It'll all come out in the wash. Come on and get some sleep. Everything'll turn out all right in the end. (ROBERT *can be heard stumbling to his feet, and the dark figures of the two brothers can be seen groping their way toward the doorway in the rear as*

(*The Curtain Falls*)

BEYOND THE HORIZON

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

Scene One

Same as Act One, Scene Two. Sitting room of the farm house about half past twelve in the afternoon of a hot, sun-baked day in mid-summer, three years later. All the windows are open, but no breeze stirs the soiled white curtains. A patched screen door is in the rear. Through it the yard can be seen, its small stretch of lawn divided by the dirt path leading to the door from the gate in the white picket fence which borders the road.

The room has changed, not so much in its outward appearance as in its general atmosphere. Little significant details give evidence of carelessness, of inefficiency, of an industry gone to seed. The chairs appear shabby from lack of paint; the table cover is spotted and askew; holes show in the curtains; a child's doll, with one arm gone, lies under the table; a hoe stands in a corner; a man's coat is flung on the couch in the rear; the desk is cluttered up with odds and ends; a number of books are piled carelessly on the sideboard. The noon enervation of the sultry, scorching day seems to have penetrated indoors, causing even inanimate objects to wear an aspect of despondent exhaustion.

A place is set at the end of the table, left, for someone's dinner. Through the open door to the kitchen comes the clatter of dishes being washed, interrupted at intervals by a woman's irritated voice and the peevish whining of a child.

At the rise of the curtain MRS. MAYO *and* MRS. ATKINS *are discovered sitting facing each other,* MRS. MAYO *to the rear,* MRS. ATKINS *to the right of the table.* MRS. MAYO'S *face has lost all character, disintegrated, become a weak mask wearing a helpless, doleful expression of being constantly on the verge of comfortless tears. She speaks in an uncertain voice, without assertiveness, as if all power of willing had deserted her.* MRS. ATKINS *is in her wheel chair. She is a thin, pale-faced, unintelligent looking woman of about forty-eight, with hard, bright eyes. A victim of partial paralysis for many years, condemned to be pushed from day to day of her life in a wheel chair, she has developed the selfish, irritable nature of the chronic invalid. Both women are dressed in black.* MRS. ATKINS *knits nervously as she talks. A ball of unused yarn, with needles stuck through it, lies on the table before* MRS. MAYO.

MRS. ATKINS. (*with a disapproving glance at the place set on the table*) Robert's late for his dinner again, as usual. I don't see why Ruth puts up with it, and I've told her so. Many's the time I've said to her "It's about time you put a stop to his nonsense. Does he suppose you're runnin' a hotel —with no one to help with things?" But she don't pay no attention. She's as bad as he is, a'most—thinks she knows better than an old, sick body like me.

MRS. MAYO. (*dully*) Robbie's always late for things. He can't help it, Sarah.

MRS. ATKINS. (*with a snort*) Can't help it! How you do go on, Kate, findin' excuses for him! Anybody can help anything they've a mind to—as long as they've got health, and

ain't rendered helpless like me—(*She adds as a pious afterthought*)—through the will of God.

MRS. MAYO. Robbie can't.

MRS. ATKINS. Can't! It do make me mad, Kate Mayo, to see folks that God gave all the use of their limbs to potterin' round and wastin' time doin' everything the wrong way—and me powerless to help and at their mercy, you might say. And it ain't that I haven't pointed the right way to 'em. I've talked to Robert thousands of times and told him how things ought to be done. You know that, Kate Mayo. But d'you s'pose he takes any notice of what I say? Or Ruth, either—my own daughter? No, they think I'm a crazy, cranky old woman, half dead a'ready, and the sooner I'm in the grave and out o' their way the better it'd suit them.

MRS. MAYO. You mustn't talk that way, Sarah. They're not as wicked as that. And you've got years and years before you.

MRS. ATKINS. You're like the rest, Kate. You don't know how near the end I am. Well, at least I can go to my eternal rest with a clear conscience. I've done all a body could do to avert ruin from this house. On their heads be it!

MRS. MAYO. (*with hopeless indifference*) Things might be worse. Robert never had any experience in farming. You can't expect him to learn in a day.

MRS. ATKINS. (*snappily*) He's had three years to learn, and he's gettin' worse 'stead of better. Not on'y your place but mine too is driftin' to rack and ruin, and I can't do nothin' to prevent.

MRS. MAYO. (*with a spark of assertiveness*) You can't say but Robbie works hard, Sarah.

MRS. ATKINS. What good's workin' hard if it don't accomplish anythin', I'd like to know?

MRS. MAYO. Robbie's had bad luck against him.

MRS. ATKINS. Say what you've a mind to, Kate, the proof of the puddin's in the eatin'; and you can't deny that things have been goin' from bad to worse ever since your husband died two years back.

MRS. MAYO. (*wiping tears from her eyes with her handkerchief*) It was God's will that he should be taken.

MRS. ATKINS. (*triumphantly*) It was God's punishment on James Mayo for the blasphemin' and denyin' of God he done all his sinful life! (MRS. MAYO *begins to weep softly*) There, Kate, I shouldn't be remindin' you, I know. He's at peace, poor man, and forgiven, let's pray.

MRS. MAYO. (*wiping her eyes—simply*) James was a good man.

MRS. ATKINS. (*ignoring this remark*) What I was sayin' was that since Robert's been in charge things've been goin' down hill steady. You don't know *how* bad they are. Robert don't let on to you what's happenin'; and you'd never see it yourself if 'twas under your nose. But, thank the Lord, Ruth still comes to me once in a while for advice when she's worried near out of her senses by his goin's-on. Do you know what she told me last night? But I forgot, she said not to tell you —still I think you've got a right to know, and it's my duty not to let such things go on behind your back.

MRS. MAYO. (*wearily*) You can tell me if you want to.

MRS. ATKINS. (*bending over toward her—in a low voi.* Ruth was almost crazy about it. Robert told her he'd have to mortgage the farm—said he didn't know how he'd pull through

'til harvest without it, and he can't get money any other way. (*She straightens up—indignantly*) Now what do you think of your Robert?

MRS. MAYO. (*resignedly*) If it has to be——

MRS. ATKINS. You don't mean to say you're goin' to sign away your farm, Kate Mayo—after me warnin' you?

MRS. MAYO.—I'll do what Robbie says is needful.

MRS. ATKINS. (*holding up her hands*) Well, of all the foolishness!—well, it's your farm, not mine, and I've nothin' more to say.

MRS. MAYO. Maybe Robbie'll manage till Andy gets back and sees to things. It can't be long now.

MRS. ATKINS (*with keen interest*) Ruth says Andy ought to turn up any day. When does Robert figger he'll get here?

MRS. MAYO. He says he can't calculate exactly on account o' the *Sunda* being a sail boat. Last letter he got was from England, the day they were sailing for home. That was over a month ago, and Robbie thinks they're overdue now.

MRS. ATKINS. We can give praise to God then that he'll be back in the nick o' time. He ought to be tired of travelin' and anxious to get home and settle down to work again.

MRS. MAYO. Andy *has* been working. He's head officer on Dick's boat, he wrote Robbie. You know that.

MRS. ATKINS. That foolin' on ships is all right for a spell, but he must be right sick of it by this.

MRS. MAYO. (*musingly*) I wonder if he's changed much. He used to be so fine-looking and strong. (*With a sigh*) Three years! It seems more like three hundred. (*Her eyes filling—piteously*) Oh, if James could only have lived 'til he came back—and forgiven him!

MRS. ATKINS. He never would have—not James Mayo! Didn't he keep his heart hardened against him till the last in spite of all you and Robert did to soften him?

MRS. MAYO. (*with a feeble flash of anger*) Don't you dare say that! (*Brokenly*) Oh, I know deep down in his heart he forgave Andy, though he was too stubborn ever to own up to it. It was that brought on his death—breaking his heart just on account of his stubborn pride. (*She wipes her eyes with her handkerchief and sobs*).

MRS. ATKINS. (*piously*) It was the will of God. (*The whining crying of the child sounds from the kitchen.* MRS. ATKINS *frowns irritably*) Drat that young one! Seems as if she cries all the time on purpose to set a body's nerves on edge.

MRS. MAYO. (*wiping her eyes*) It's the heat upsets her. Mary doesn't feel any too well these days, poor little child!

MRS. ATKINS. She gets it right from her Pa—bein' sickly all the time. You can't deny Robert was always ailin' as a child. (*She sighs heavily*) It was a crazy mistake for them two to get married. I argyed against it at the time, but Ruth was so spelled with Robert's wild poetry notions she wouldn't listen to sense. Andy was the one would have been the match for her.

MRS. MAYO. I've often thought since it might have been better the other way. But Ruth and Robbie seem happy enough together.

MRS. ATKINS. At any rate it was God's work—and His will be done. (*The two women sit in silence for a moment.* RUTH *enters from the kitchen, carrying in her arms her two year old daughter,* MARY, *a pretty but sickly and œnemic looking child with a tear-stained face.* RUTH *has aged appreciably. Her*

face has lost its youth and freshness. There is a trace in her expression of something hard and spiteful. She sits in the rocker in front of the table and sighs wearily. She wears a gingham dress with a soiled apron tied around her waist).

RUTH. Land sakes, if this isn't a scorcher! That kitchen's like a furnace. Phew! (*She pushes the damp hair back from her forehead*).

MRS. MAYO. Why didn't you call me to help with the dishes?

RUTH. (*shortly*) No. The heat in there'd kill you.

MARY. (*sees the doll under the table and struggles on her mother's lap*) Dolly, Mama! Dolly!

RUTH. (*pulling her back*) It's time for your nap. You can't play with Dolly now.

MARY. (*commencing to cry whiningly*) Dolly!

MRS. ATKINS. (*irritably*) Can't you keep that child still? Her racket's enough to split a body's ears. Put her down and let her play with the doll if it'll quiet her.

RUTH. (*lifting* MARY *to the floor*) There! I hope you'll be satisfied and keep still. (MARY *sits down on the floor before the table and plays with the doll in silence.* RUTH *glances at the place set on the table*) It's a wonder Rob wouldn't try to get to meals on time once in a while.

MRS. MAYO. (*dully*) Something must have gone wrong again.

RUTH. (*wearily*) I s'pose so. Something's always going wrong these days, it looks like.

MRS. ATKINS. (*snappily*) It wouldn't if you possessed a bit of spunk. The idea of you permittin' him to come in to meals at all hours—and you doin' the work! I never heard of such a thin'. You're too easy goin', that's the trouble.

RUTH. Do stop your nagging at me, Ma! I'm sick of hearing you. I'll do as I please about it; and thank you for not interfering. (*She wipes her moist forehead—wearily*) Phew! It's too hot to argue. Let's talk of something pleasant. (*Curiously*) Didn't I hear you speaking about Andy a while ago?

MRS. MAYO. We were wondering when he'd get home.

RUTH. (*brightening*) Rob says any day now he's liable to drop in and surprise us—him and the Captain. It'll certainly look natural to see him around the farm again.

MRS. ATKINS. Let's hope the farm'll look more natural, too, when he's had a hand at it. The way thin's are now!

RUTH. (*irritably*) Will you stop harping on that, Ma? We all know things aren't as they might be. What's the good of your complaining all the time?

MRS. ATKINS. There, Kate Mayo! Ain't that just what I told you? I can't say a word of advice to my own daughter even, she's that stubborn and self-willed.

RUTH. (*putting her hands over her ears—in exasperation*) For goodness sakes, Ma!

MRS. MAYO. (*dully*) Never mind. Andy'll fix everything when he comes.

RUTH. (*hopefully*) Oh, yes, I know he will. He always did know just the right thing ought to be done. (*With weary vexation*) It's a shame for him to come home and have to start in with things in such a topsy-turvy.

MRS. MAYO. Andy'll manage.

RUTH. (*sighing*) I s'pose it isn't Rob's fault things go wrong with him.

MRS. ATKINS. (*scornfully*) Hump! (*She fans herself*

nervously) Land o' Goshen, but it's bakin' in here! Let's go out in under the trees in back where there's a breath of fresh air. Come, Kate. (MRS. MAYO *gets up obediently and starts to wheel the invalid's chair toward the screen door*) You better come too, Ruth. It'll do you good. Learn him a lesson and let him get his own dinner. Don't be such a fool.

RUTH. (*going and holding the screen door open for them—listlessly*) He wouldn't mind. He doesn't eat much. But I can't go anyway. I've got to put baby to bed.

MRS. ATKINS. Let's go, Kate. I'm boilin' in here. (MRS. MAYO *wheels her out and off left.* RUTH *comes back and sits down in her chair*).

RUTH. (*mechanically*) Come and let me take off your shoes and stockings, Mary, that's a good girl. You've got to take your nap now. (*The child continues to play as if she hadn't heard, absorbed in her doll. An eager expression comes over* RUTH'S *tired face. She glances toward the door furtively—then gets up and goes to the desk. Her movements indicate a guilty fear of discovery. She takes a letter from a pigeonhole and retreats swiftly to her chair with it. She opens the envelope and reads the letter with great interest, a flush of excitement coming to her cheeks.* ROBERT *walks up the path and opens the screen door quietly and comes into the room. He, too, has aged. His shoulders are stooped as if under too great a burden. His eyes are dull and lifeless, his face burned by the sun and unshaven for days. Streaks of sweat have smudged the layer of dust on his cheeks. His lips drawn down at the corners, give him a hopeless, resigned expression. The three years have accentuated the weakness of his mouth and*

chin. He is dressed in overalls, laced boots, and a flannel shirt open at the neck).

ROBERT. (*throwing his hat over on the sofa—with a great sigh of exhaustion*) Phew! The sun's hot today! (RUTH *is startled. At first she makes an instinctive motion as if to hide the letter in her bosom. She immediately thinks better of this and sits with the letter in her hands looking at him with defiant eyes. He bends down and kisses her*).

RUTH. (*feeling of her cheek—irritably*) Why don't you shave? You look awful.

ROBERT. (*indifferently*) I forgot—and it's too much trouble this weather.

MARY. (*throwing aside her doll, runs to him with a happy cry*) Dada! Dada!

ROBERT. (*swinging her up above his head—lovingly*) And how's this little girl of mine this hot day, eh?

MARY. (*screeching happily*) Dada! Dada!

RUTH. (*in annoyance*) Don't do that to her! You know it's time for her nap and you'll get her all waked up; then I'll be the one that'll have to sit beside her till she falls asleep.

ROBERT. (*sitting down in the chair on the left of table and cuddling* MARY *on his lap*) You needn't bother. I'll put her to bed.

RUTH. (*shortly*) You've got to get back to your work, I s'pose.

ROBERT. (*with a sigh*) Yes, I was forgetting. (*He glances at the open letter on* RUTH's *lap*) Reading Andy's letter again? I should think you'd know it by heart by this time.

RUTH. (*coloring as if she'd been accused of something—*

defiantly) I've got a right to read it, haven't I? He says it's meant for all of us.

ROBERT. (*with a trace of irritation*) Right? Don't be so silly. There's no question of right. I was only saying that you must know all that's in it after so many readings.

RUTH. Well, I don't. (*She puts the letter on the table and gets wearily to her feet*) I s'pose you'll be wanting your dinner now.

ROBERT. (*listlessly*) I don't care. I'm not hungry.

RUTH. And here I been keeping it hot for you!

ROBERT. (*irritably*) Oh, all right then. Bring it in and I'll try to eat.

RUTH. I've got to get her to bed first. (*She goes to lift* MARY *off his lap*) Come, dear. It's after time and you can hardly keep your eyes open now.

MARY. (*crying*) No, no! (*Appealing to her father*) Dada! No!

RUTH. (*accusingly to* ROBERT) There! Now see what you've done! I told you not to——

ROBERT. (*shortly*) Let her alone, then. She's all right where she is. She'll fall asleep on my lap in a minute if you'll stop bothering her.

RUTH. (*hotly*) She'll not do any such thing! She's got to learn to mind me! (*Shaking her finger at* MARY) You naughty child! Will you come with Mama when she tells you for your own good?

MARY. (*clinging to her father*) No, Dada!

RUTH. (*losing her temper*) A good spanking's what you need, my young lady—and you'll get one from me if you don't mind better, d'you hear? (MARY *starts to whimper frightenedly*).

ROBERT. (*with sudden anger*) Leave her alone! How often have I told you not to threaten her with whipping? I won't have it. (*Soothing the wailing* MARY) There! There, little girl! Baby mustn't cry. Dada won't like you if you do. Dada'll hold you and you must promise to go to sleep like a good little girl. Will you when Dada asks you?

MARY. (*cuddling up to him*) Yes, Dada.

RUTH. (*looking at them, her pale face set and drawn*) A fine one you are to be telling folks how to do things! (*She bites her lips. Husband and wife look into each other's eyes with something akin to hatred in their expressions; then* RUTH *turns away with a shrug of affected indifference*) All right, take care of her then, if you think it's so easy. (*She walks away into the kitchen*).

ROBERT. (*smoothing* MARY'S *hair—tenderly*) We'll show Mama you're a good little girl, won't we?

MARY. (*crooning drowsily*) Dada, Dada.

ROBERT. Let's see: Does your mother take off your shoes and stockings before your nap?

MARY. (*nodding with half-shut eyes*) Yes, Dada.

ROBERT. (*taking off her shoes and stockings*) We'll show Mama we know how to do those things, won't we? There's one old shoe off—and there's the other old shoe—and here's one old stocking—and there's the other old stocking. There we are, all nice and cool and comfy. (*He bends down and kisses her*) And now will you promise to go right to sleep if Dada takes you to bed? (MARY *nods sleepily*) That's the good little girl. (*He gathers her up in his arms carefully and carries her into the bedroom. His voice can be heard faintly as he lulls the child to sleep.* RUTH *comes out of the*

kitchen and gets the plate from the table. She hears the voice from the room and tiptoes to the door to look in. Then she starts for the kitchen but stands for a moment thinking, a look of ill-concealed jealousy on her face. At a noise from inside she hurriedly disappears into the kitchen. A moment later ROBERT *re-enters. He comes forward and picks up the shoes and stockings which he shoves carelessly under the table. Then, seeing no one about, he goes to the sideboard and selects a book. Coming back to his chair, he sits down and immediately becomes absorbed in reading.* RUTH *returns from the kitchen bringing his plate heaped with food, and a cup of tea. She sets those before him and sits down in her former place.* ROBERT *continues to read, oblivious to the food on the table).*

RUTH. (*after watching him irritably for a moment*) For heaven's sakes, put down that old book! Don't you see your dinner's getting cold?

ROBERT. (*closing his book*) Excuse me, Ruth. I didn't notice. (*He picks up his knife and fork and begins to eat gingerly, without appetite*).

RUTH. I should think you might have some feeling for me, Rob, and not always be late for meals. If you think it's fun sweltering in that oven of a kitchen to keep things warm for you, you're mistaken.

ROBERT. I'm sorry, Ruth, really I am. Something crops up every day to delay me. I mean to be here on time.

RUTH. (*with a sigh*) Mean-tos don't count.

ROBERT. (*with a conciliating smile*) Then punish me, Ruth. Let the food get cold and don't bother about me.

RUTH. I'd have to wait just the same to wash up after you.

ROBERT. But I can wash up.

RUTH. A nice mess there'd be then!

ROBERT. (*with an attempt at lightness*) The food is lucky to be able to get cold this weather. (*As* RUTH *doesn't answer or smile he opens his book and resumes his reading, forcing himself to take a mouthful of food every now and then.* RUTH *stares at him in annoyance*).

RUTH. And besides, you've got your own work that's got to be done.

ROBERT. (*absent-mindedly, without taking his eyes from the book*) Yes, of course.

RUTH. (*spitefully*) Work you'll never get done by reading books all the time.

ROBERT. (*shutting the book with a snap*) Why do you persist in nagging at me for getting pleasure out of reading? Is it because—— (*He checks himself abruptly*).

RUTH. (*coloring*) Because I'm too stupid to understand them, I s'pose you were going to say.

ROBERT. (*shame-facedly*) No—no. (*In exasperation*) Why do you goad me into saying things I don't mean? Haven't I got my share of troubles trying to work this cursed farm without your adding to them? You know how hard I've tried to keep things going in spite of bad luck——

RUTH. (*scornfully*) Bad luck!

ROBERT. And my own very apparent unfitness for the job, I was going to add; but you can't deny there's been bad luck to it, too. Why don't you take things into consideration? Why can't we pull together? We used to. I know it's hard on you also. Then why can't we help each other instead of hindering?

RUTH. (*sullenly*) I do the best I know how.

ROBERT. (*gets up and puts his hand on her shoulder*) I know you do. But let's both of us try to do better. We can both improve. Say a word of encouragement once in a while when things go wrong, even if it is my fault. You know the odds I've been up against since Pa died. I'm not a farmer. I've never claimed to be one. But there's nothing else I can do under the circumstances, and I've got to pull things through somehow. With your help, I can do it. With you against me—— (*He shrugs his shoulders. There is a pause. Then he bends down and kisses her hair—with an attempt at cheerfulness*) So you promise that; and I'll promise to be here when the clock strikes—and anything else you tell me to. Is it a bargain?

RUTH. (*dully*) I s'pose so. (*They are interrupted by the sound of a loud knock at the kitchen door*) There's someone at the kitchen door. (*She hurries out. A moment later she reappears*) It's Ben.

ROBERT. (*frowning*) What's the trouble now, I wonder? (*In a loud voice*) Come on in here, Ben. (BEN *slouches in from the kitchen. He is a hulking, awkward young fellow with a heavy, stupid face and shifty, cunning eyes. He is dressed in overalls, boots, etc., and wears a broad-brimmed hat of coarse straw pushed back on his head*) Well, Ben, what's the matter?

BEN. (*drawlingly*) The mowin' machine's bust.

ROBERT. Why, that can't be. The man fixed it only last week.

BEN. It's bust just the same.

ROBERT. And can't you fix it?

BEN. No. Don't know what's the matter with the goll-darned thing. 'Twon't work, anyhow.

ROBERT. (*getting up and going for his hat*) Wait a minute and I'll go look it over. There can't be much the matter with it.

BEN. (*impudently*) Don't make no diff'rence t' me whether there be or not. I'm quittin'.

ROBERT. (*anxiously*) You don't mean you're throwing up your job here?

BEN. That's what! My month's up today and I want what's owin' t' me.

ROBERT. But why are you quitting now, Ben, when you know I've so much work on hand? I'll have a hard time getting another man at such short notice.

BEN. That's for you to figger. I'm quittin'.

ROBERT. But what's your reason? You haven't any complaint to make about the way you've been treated, have you?

BEN. No. 'Tain't that. (*Shaking his finger*) Look-a-here. I'm sick o' being made fun at, that's what; an' I got a job up to Timms' place; an' I'm quittin' here.

ROBERT. Being made fun of? I don't understand you. Who's making fun of you?

BEN. They all do. When I drive down with the milk in the mornin' they all laughs and jokes at me—that boy up to Harris' and the new feller up to Slocum's, and Bill Evans down to Meade's, and all the rest on 'em.

ROBERT. That's a queer reason for leaving me flat. Won't they laugh at you just the same when you're working for Timms?

BEN. They wouldn't dare to. Timms is the best farm here-

abouts. They was laughin' at me for workin' for *you,* that's what! "How're things up to the Mayo place?" they hollers every mornin'. "What's Robert doin' now—pasturin' the cattle in the cornlot? Is he seasonin' his hay with rain this year, same as last?" they shouts. "Or is he inventin' some 'lectrical milkin' engine to fool them dry cows o' his into givin' hard cider?" (*Very much ruffled*) That's like they talks; and I ain't goin' to put up with it no longer. Everyone's always knowed me as a first-class hand hereabouts, and I ain't wantin' 'em to get no different notion. So I'm quittin' you. And I wants what's comin' to me.

ROBERT. (*coldly*) Oh, if that's the case, you can go to the devil. You'll get your money tomorrow when I get back from town—not before!

BEN. (*turning to doorway to kitchen*) That suits me. (*As he goes out he speaks back over his shoulder*) And see that I do get it, or there'll be trouble. (*He disappears and the slamming of the kitchen door is heard*).

ROBERT. (*as* RUTH *comes from where she has been standing by the doorway and sits down dejectedly in her old place*) The stupid damn fool! And now what about the haying? That's an example of what I'm up against. No one can say I'm responsible for that.

RUTH. He wouldn't dare act that way with anyone else! (*Spitefully, with a glance at* ANDREW'S *letter on the table*) It's lucky Andy's coming back.

ROBERT. (*without resentment*) Yes, Andy'll see the right thing to do in a jiffy. (*With an affectionate smile*) I wonder if the old chump's changed much? He doesn't seem to from his letters, does he? (*Shaking his head*) But just the same

I doubt if he'll want to settle down to a hum-drum farm life, after all he's been through.

RUTH. (*resentfully*) Andy's not like you. He likes the farm.

ROBERT. (*immersed in his own thoughts—enthusiastically*) Gad, the things he's seen and experienced! Think of the places he's been! All the wonderful far places I used to dream about! God, how I envy him! What a trip! (*He springs to his feet and instinctively goes to the window and stares out at the horizon*).

RUTH. (*bitterly*) I s'pose you're sorry now you didn't go?

ROBERT. (*too occupied with his own thoughts to hear her—vindictively*) Oh, those cursed hills out there that I used to think promised me so much! How I've grown to hate the sight of them! They're like the walls of a narrow prison yard shutting me in from all the freedom and wonder of life! (*He turns back to the room with a gesture of loathing*) Sometimes I think if it wasn't for you, Ruth, and—(*his voice softening*)—little Mary, I'd chuck everything up and walk down the road with just one desire in my heart—to put the whole rim of the world between me and those hills, and be able to breathe freely once more! (*He sinks down into his chair and smiles with bitter self-scorn*) There I go dreaming again—my old fool dreams.

RUTH. (*in a low, repressed voice—her eyes smoldering*) You're not the only one!

ROBERT. (*buried in his own thoughts—bitterly*) And Andy, who's had the chance—what has he got out of it? His letters read like the diary of a—of a farmer! "We're in Singapore now. It's a dirty hole of a place and hotter than hell.

Two of the crew are down with fever and we're short-handed on the work. I'll be damn glad when we sail again, although tacking back and forth in these blistering seas is a rotten job too!" (*Scornfully*) That's about the way he summed up his impressions of the East.

RUTH. (*her repressed voice trembling*) You needn't make fun of Andy.

ROBERT. When I think—but what's the use? You know I wasn't making fun of Andy personally, but his attitude toward things is——

RUTH. (*her eyes flashing—bursting into uncontrollable rage*) You was too making fun of him! And I ain't going to stand for it! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! (ROBERT *stares at her in amazement. She continues furiously*) A fine one to talk about anyone else—after the way you've ruined everything with your lazy loafing!—and the stupid way you do things!

ROBERT. (*angrily*) Stop that kind of talk, do you hear?

RUTH. You findin' fault—with your own brother who's ten times the man you ever was or ever will be! You're jealous, that's what! Jealous because he's made a man of himself, while you're nothing but a—but a—— (*She stutters incoherently, overcome by rage*).

ROBERT. Ruth! Ruth! You'll be sorry for talking like that.

RUTH. I won't! I won't never be sorry! I'm only saying what I've been thinking for years.

ROBERT. (*aghast*) Ruth! You can't mean that!

RUTH. What do you think—living with a man like you—having to suffer all the time because you've never been man enough to work and do things like other people. But no! You never own up to that. You think you're so much better

than other folks, with your college education, where you never learned a thing, and always reading your stupid books instead of working. I s'pose you think I ought to be *proud* to be your wife—a poor, ignorant thing like me! (*Fiercely*) But I'm not. I hate it! I hate the sight of you. Oh, if I'd only known! If I hadn't been such a fool to listen to your cheap, silly, poetry talk that you learned out of books! If I could have seen how you were in your true self—like you are now—I'd have killed myself before I'd have married you! I was sorry for it before we'd been together a month. I knew what you were really like—when it was too late.

ROBERT. (*his voice raised loudly*) And now—I'm finding out what you're really like—what a—a creature I've been living with. (*With a harsh laugh*) God! It wasn't that I haven't guessed how mean and small you are—but I've kept on telling myself that I must be wrong—like a fool!—like a damned fool!

RUTH. You were saying you'd go out on the road if it wasn't for me. Well, you can go, and the sooner the better! I don't care! I'll be glad to get rid of you! The farm'll be better off too. There's been a curse on it ever since you took hold. So go! Go and be a tramp like you've always wanted. It's all you're good for. I can get along without you, don't you worry. (*Exulting fiercely*) Andy's coming back, don't forget that! He'll attend to things like they should be. He'll show what a man can do! I don't need you. Andy's coming!

ROBERT. (*they are both standing.* ROBERT *grabs her by the shoulders and glares into her eyes*) What do you mean? (*He shakes her violently*) What are you thinking of? What's in your evil mind, you—you—— (*His voice is a harsh shout*).

RUTH. (*in a defiant scream*) Yes I do mean it! I'd say it if you was to kill me! I do love Andy. I do! I do! I always loved him. (*Exultantly*) And he loves me! He loves me! I know he does. He always did! And you know he did, too! So go! Go if you want to!

ROBERT. (*throwing her away from him. She staggers back against the table—thickly*) You—you slut! (*He stands glaring at her as she leans back, supporting herself by the table, gasping for breath. A loud frightened whimper sounds from the awakened child in the bedroom. It continues. The man and woman stand looking at one another in horror, the extent of their terrible quarrel suddenly brought home to them. A pause. The noise of a horse and carriage comes from the road before the house. The two, suddenly struck by the same premonition, listen to it breathlessly, as to a sound heard in a dream. It stops. They hear* ANDY'S *voice from the road shouting a long hail—"Ahoy there!"*)

RUTH. (*with a strangled cry of joy*) Andy! Andy! (*She rushes and grabs the knob of the screen door, about to fling it open*).

ROBERT. (*in a voice of command that forces obedience*) Stop! (*He goes to the door and gently pushes the trembling* RUTH *away from it. The child's crying rises to a louder pitch*) I'll meet Andy. You better go in to Mary, Ruth. (*She looks at him defiantly for a moment, but there is something in his eyes that makes her turn and walk slowly into the bedroom*).

ANDY'S VOICE. (*in a louder shout*) Ahoy there, Rob!

ROBERT. (*in an answering shout of forced cheeriness*) Hello, Andy! (*He opens the door and walks out as*

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT TWO

Scene Two

The top of a hill on the farm. It is about eleven o'clock the next morning. The day is hot and cloudless. In the distance the sea can be seen.

The top of the hill slopes downward slightly toward the left. A big boulder stands in the center toward the rear. Further right, a large oak tree. The faint trace of a path leading upward to it from the left foreground can be detected through the bleached, sun-scorched grass.

ROBERT *is discovered sitting on the boulder, his chin resting on his hands, staring out toward the horizon seaward. His face is pale and haggard, his expression one of utter despondency.* MARY *is sitting on the grass near him in the shade, playing with her doll, singing happily to herself. Presently she casts a curious glance at her father, and, propping her doll up against the tree, comes over and clambers to his side.*

MARY. (*pulling at his hand—solicitously*) Dada sick?

ROBERT. (*looking at her with a forced smile*) No, dear. Why?

MARY. Play wif Mary.

ROBERT. (*gently*) No, dear, not today. Dada doesn't feel like playing today.

MARY. (*protestingly*) Yes, Dada!

ROBERT. No, dear. Dada does feel sick—a little. He's got a bad headache.

MARY. Mary see. (*He bends his head. She pats his hair*) Bad head.

ROBERT. (*kissing her—with a smile*) There! It's better now, dear, thank you. (*She cuddles up close against him. There is a pause during which each of them looks out seaward*) *Finally* ROBERT *turns to her tenderly*) Would you like Dada to go away?—far, far away?

MARY. (*tearfully*) No! No! No, Dada, no!

ROBERT. Don't you like Uncle Andy—the man that came yesterday—not the old man with the white mustache—the other?

MARY. Mary loves Dada.

ROBERT. (*with fierce determination*) He won't go away, baby. He was only joking. He couldn't leave his little Mary. (*He presses the child in his arms*).

MARY. (*with an exclamation of pain*) Oh! Hurt!

ROBERT. I'm sorry, little girl. (*He lifts her down to the grass*) Go play with Dolly, that's a good girl; and be careful to keep in the shade. (*She reluctantly leaves him and takes up her doll again. A moment later she points down the hill to the left*).

MARY. Mans, Dada.

ROBERT. (*looking that way*) It's your Uncle Andy. (*A moment later* ANDREW *comes up from the left, whistling cheerfully. He has changed but little in appearance, except for the fact that his face has been deeply bronzed by his years in the tropics; but there is a decided change in his manner. The old easy-going good-nature seems to have been partly lost in a breezy, business-like briskness of voice and gesture. There is an authoritative note in his speech as though he were accustomed to give orders and have them obeyed as a matter of*

course. He is dressed in the simple blue uniform and cap of a merchant ship's officer).

ANDREW. Here you are, eh?

ROBERT. Hello, Andy.

ANDREW. (*going over to* MARY) And who's this young lady I find you all alone with, eh? Who's this pretty young lady? (*He tickles the laughing, squirming* MARY, *then lifts her up at arm's length over his head*) Upsy—daisy! (*He sets her down on the ground again*) And there you are! (*He walks over and sits down on the boulder beside* ROBERT *who moves to one side to make room for him*) Ruth told me I'd probably find you up top-side here; but I'd have guessed it, anyway. (*He digs his brother in the ribs affectionately*) Still up to your old tricks, you old beggar! I can remember how you used to come up here to mope and dream in the old days.

ROBERT. (*with a smile*) I come up here now because it's the coolest place on the farm. I've given up dreaming.

ANDREW. (*grinning*) I don't believe it. You can't have changed that much. (*After a pause—with boyish enthusiasm*) Say, it sure brings back old times to be up here with you having a chin all by our lonesomes again. I feel great being back home.

ROBERT. It's great for us to have you back.

ANDREW. (*after a pause—meaningly*) I've been looking over the old place with Ruth. Things don't seem to be——

ROBERT. (*his face flushing—interrupts his brother shortly*) Never mind the damn farm! Let's talk about something interesting. This is the first chance I've had to have a word with you alone. Tell me about your trip.

ANDREW. Why, I thought I told you everything in my letters.

ROBERT. (*smiling*) Your letters were—sketchy, to say the least.

ANDREW. Oh, I know I'm no author. You needn't be afraid of hurting my feelings. I'd rather go through a typhoon again than write a letter.

ROBERT. (*with eager interest*) Then you were through a typhoon?

ANDREW. Yes—in the China sea. Had to run before it under bare poles for two days. I thought we were bound down for Davy Jones, sure. Never dreamed waves could get so big or the wind blow so hard. If it hadn't been for Uncle Dick being such a good skipper we'd have gone to the sharks, all of us. As it was we came out minus a main top-mast and had to beat back to Hong-Kong for repairs. But I must have written you all this.

ROBERT. You never mentioned it.

ANDREW. Well, there was so much dirty work getting things ship-shape again I must have forgotten about it.

ROBERT. (*looking at* ANDREW—*marveling*) Forget a typhoon? (*with a trace of scorn*) You're a strange combination, Andy. And is what you've told me all you remember about it?

ANDREW. Oh, I could give you your bellyful of details if I wanted to turn loose on you. It was all-wool-and-a-yard-wide-Hell, I'll tell you. You ought to have been there. I remember thinking about you at the worst of it, and saying to myself: "This'd cure Rob of them ideas of his about the beautiful sea, if he could see it." And it would have too, you bet! (*He nods emphatically*).

ROBERT. (*dryly*) The sea doesn't seem to have impressed you very favorably.

ANDREW. I should say it didn't! I'll never set foot on a ship again if I can help it—except to carry me some place I can't get to by train.

ROBERT. But you studied to become an officer!

ANDREW. Had to do something or I'd gone mad. The days were like years. (*He laughs*) And as for the East you used to rave about—well, you ought to see it, and *smell* it! One walk down one of their filthy narrow streets with the tropic sun beating on it would sicken you for life with the "wonder and mystery" you used to dream of.

ROBERT. (*shrinking from his brother with a glance of aversion*) So all you found in the East was a stench?

ANDREW. *A* stench! Ten thousand of them!

ROBERT. But you did like some of the places, judging from your letters—Sydney, Buenos Aires——

ANDREW. Yes, Sydney's a good town. (*Enthusiastically*) But Buenos Aires—there's the place for you. Argentine's a country where a fellow has a chance to make good. You're right I like it. And I'll tell you, Rob, that's right where I'm going just as soon as I've seen you folks a while and can get a ship. I can get a berth as second officer, and I'll jump the ship when I get there. I'll need every cent of the wages Uncle's paid me to get a start at something in B. A.

ROBERT. (*staring at his brother—slowly*) So you're not going to stay on the farm?

ANDREW. Why sure not! Did you think I was? There wouldn't be any sense. One of us is enough to run this little place.

ROBERT. I suppose it does seem small to you now.

ANDREW. (*not noticing the sarcasm in* ROBERT'S *tone*) You've no idea, Rob, what a splendid place Argentine is. I had a letter from a marine insurance chap that I'd made friends with in Hong-Kong to his brother, who's in the grain business in Buenos Aires. He took quite a fancy to me, and what's more important, he offered me a job if I'd come back there. I'd have taken it on the spot, only I couldn't leave Uncle Dick in the lurch, and I'd promised you folks to come home. But I'm going back there, you bet, and then you watch me get on! (*He slaps* ROBERT *on the back*) But don't you think it's a big chance, Rob?

ROBERT. It's fine—for you, Andy.

ANDREW. We call this a farm—but you ought to hear about the farms down there—ten square miles where we've got an acre. It's a new country where big things are opening up—and I want to get in on something big before I die. I'm no fool when it comes to farming, and I know something about grain. I've been reading up a lot on it, too, lately. (*He notices* ROBERT'S *absent-minded expression and laughs*) Wake up, you old poetry book worm, you! I know my talking about business makes you want to choke me, doesn't it?

ROBERT. (*with an embarrassed smile*) No, Andy, I—I just happened to think of something else. (*Frowning*) There've been lots of times lately that I've wished I had some of your faculty for business.

ANDREW. (*soberly*) There's something I want to talk about, Rob,—the farm. You don't mind, do you?

ROBERT. No.

ANDREW. I walked over it this morning with Ruth—and

she told me about things—— (*Evasively*) I could see the place had run down; but you mustn't blame yourself. When luck's against anyone——

ROBERT. Don't, Andy! It *is* my fault. You know it as well as I do. The best I've ever done was to make ends meet.

ANDREW. (*after a pause*) I've got over a thousand saved, and you can have that.

ROBERT. (*firmly*) No. You need that for your start in Buenos Aires.

ANDREW. I don't. I can——

ROBERT. (*determinedly*) No, Andy! Once and for all, no! I won't hear of it!

ANDREW. (*protestingly*) You obstinate old son of a gun!

ROBERT. Oh, everything'll be on a sound footing after harvest. Don't worry about it.

ANDREW. (*doubtfully*) Maybe. (*After a pause*) It's too bad Pa couldn't have lived to see things through. (*With feeling*) It cut me up a lot—hearing he was dead. He never —softened up, did he—about me, I mean?

ROBERT. He never understood, that's a kinder way of putting it. He does now.

ANDREW. (*after a pause*) You've forgotten all about what —caused me to go, haven't you, Rob? (ROBERT *nods but keeps his face averted*) I was a slushier damn fool in those days than you were. But it was an act of Providence I did go. It opened my eyes to how I'd been fooling myself. Why, I'd forgotten all about—that—before I'd been at sea six months.

ROBERT. (*turns and looks into* ANDREW'S *eyes searchingly*) You're speaking of—Ruth?

ANDREW. (*confused*) Yes. I didn't want you to get false notions in your head, or I wouldn't say anything. (*Looking* ROBERT *squarely in the eyes*) I'm telling you the truth when I say I'd forgotten long ago. It don't sound well for me, getting over things so easy, but I guess it never really amounted to more than a kid idea I was letting rule me. I'm certain now I never was in love—I was getting fun out of thinking I was —and being a hero to myself. (*He heaves a great sigh of relief*) There! Gosh, I'm glad that's off my chest. I've been feeling sort of awkward ever since I've been home, thinking of what you two might think. (*A trace of appeal in his voice*) You've got it all straight now, haven't you, Rob?

ROBERT. (*in a low voice*) Yes, Andy.

ANDREW. And I'll tell Ruth, too, if I can get up the nerve. She must feel kind of funny having me round—after what used to be—and not knowing how I feel about it.

ROBERT. (*slowly*) Perhaps—for her sake—you'd better not tell her.

ANDREW. For her sake? Oh, you mean she wouldn't want to be reminded of my foolishness? Still, I think it'd be worse if——

ROBERT. (*breaking out—in an agonized voice*) Do as you please, Andy; but for God's sake, let's not talk about it! (*There is a pause.* ANDREW *stares at* ROBERT *in hurt stupefaction.* ROBERT *continues after a moment in a voice which he vainly attempts to keep calm*) Excuse me, Andy. This rotten headache has my nerves shot to pieces.

ANDREW. (*mumbling*) It's all right, Rob—long as you're not sore at me.

ROBERT. Where did Uncle Dick disappear to this morning?

ANDREW. He went down to the port to see to things on the *Sunda*. He said he didn't know exactly when he'd be back. I'll have to go down and tend to the ship when he comes. That's why I dressed up in these togs.

MARY. (*pointing down the hill to the left*) See! Mama! Mama! (*She struggles to her feet.* RUTH *appears at left. She is dressed in white, shows she has been fixing up. She looks pretty, flushed and full of life*).

MARY. (*running to her mother*) Mama!

RUTH. (*kissing her*) Hello, dear! (*She walks toward the rock and addresses* ROBERT *coldly*) Jake wants to see you about something. He finished working where he was. He's waiting for you at the road.

ROBERT. (*getting up—wearily*) I'll go down right away. (*As he looks at* RUTH, *noting her changed appearance, his face darkens with pain*).

RUTH. And take Mary with you, please. (*To* MARY) Go with Dada, that's a good girl. Grandma has your dinner most ready for you.

ROBERT. (*shortly*) Come, Mary!

MARY. (*taking his hand and dancing happily beside him*) Dada! Dada! (*They go down the hill to the left.* RUTH *looks after them for a moment, frowning—then turns to* ANDY *with a smile*) I'm going to sit down. Come on, Andy. It'll be like old times. (*She jumps lightly to the top of the rock and sits down*) It's so fine and cool up here after the house.

ANDREW. (*half-sitting on the side of the boulder*) Yes. It's great.

RUTH. I've taken a holiday in honor of your arrival. (*Laughing excitedly*) I feel so free I'd like to have wings and fly over the sea. You're a man. You can't know how awful and stupid it is—cooking and washing dishes all the time.

ANDREW. (*making a wry face*) I can guess.

RUTH. Besides, your mother just insisted on getting your first dinner to home, she's that happy at having you back. You'd think I was planning to poison you the flurried way she shooed me out of the kitchen.

ANDREW. That's just like Ma, bless her!

RUTH. She's missed you terrible. We all have. And you can't deny the farm has, after what I showed you and told you when we was looking over the place this morning.

ANDREW. (*with a frown*) Things are run down, that's a fact! It's too darn hard on poor old Rob.

RUTH. (*scornfully*) It's his own fault. He never takes any interest in things.

ANDREW. (*reprovingly*) You can't blame him. He wasn't born for it; but I know he's done his best for your sake and the old folks and the little girl.

RUTH. (*indifferently*) Yes, I suppose he has. (*Gayly*) But thank the Lord, all those days are over now. The "hard luck" Rob's always blaming won't last long when you take hold, Andy. All the farm's ever needed was someone with the knack of looking ahead and preparing for what's going to happen.

ANDREW. Yes, Rob hasn't got that. He's frank to own up to that himself. I'm going to try and hire a good man for

him—an experienced farmer—to work the place on a salary and percentage. That'll take it off of Rob's hands, and he needn't be worrying himself to death any more. He looks all worn out, Ruth. He ought to be careful.

RUTH. (*absent-mindedly*) Yes, I s'pose. (*Her mind is filled with premonitions by the first part of his statement*) Why do you want to hire a man to oversee things? Seems as if now that you're back it wouldn't be needful.

ANDREW. Oh, of course I'll attend to everything while I'm here. I mean after I'm gone.

RUTH. (*as if she couldn't believe her ears*) Gone!

ANDREW. Yes. When I leave for the Argentine again.

RUTH. (*aghast*) You're going away to sea!

ANDREW. Not to sea, no; I'm through with the sea for good as a job. I'm going down to Buenos Aires to get in the grain business.

RUTH. But—that's far off—isn't it?

ANDREW. (*easily*) Six thousand miles more or less. It's quite a trip. (*With enthusiasm*) I've got a peach of a chance down there, Ruth. Ask Rob if I haven't. I've just been telling him all about it.

RUTH. (*a flush of anger coming over her face*) And didn't he try to stop you from going?

ANDREW. (*in surprise*) No, of course not. Why?

RUTH. (*slowly and vindictively*) That's just like him—not to.

ANDREW. (*resentfully*) Rob's too good a chum to try and stop me when he knows I'm set on a thing. And he could see just as soon's I told him what a good chance it was.

RUTH. (*dazedly*) And you're bound on going?

ANDREW. Sure thing. Oh, I don't mean right off. I'll have to wait for a ship sailing there for quite a while, likely. Anyway, I want to stay to home and visit with you folks a spell before I go.

RUTH. (*dumbly*) I s'pose. (*With sudden anguish*) Oh, Andy, you can't go! You can't. Why we've all thought—we've all been hoping and praying you was coming home to stay, to settle down on the farm and see to things. You mustn't go! Think of how your Ma'll take on if you go—and how the farm'll be ruined if you leave it to Rob to look after. You can see that.

ANDREW. (*frowning*) Rob hasn't done so bad. When I get a man to direct things the farm'll be safe enough.

RUTH. (*insistently*) But your Ma—think of her.

ANDREW. She's used to me being away. She won't object when she knows it's best for her and all of us for me to go. You ask Rob. In a couple of years down there I'll make my pile, see if I don't; and then I'll come back and settle down and turn this farm into the crackiest place in the whole state. In the meantime, I can help you both from down there. (*Earnestly*) I tell you, Ruth, I'm going to make good right from the minute I land, if working hard and a determination to get on can do it; and I *know* they can! (*Excitedly—in a rather boastful tone*) I tell you, I feel ripe for bigger things than settling down here. The trip did that for me, anyway. It showed me the world is a larger proposition than ever I thought it was in the old days. I couldn't be content any more stuck here like a fly in molasses. It all seems trifling, somehow. You ought to be able to understand what I feel.

RUTH. (*dully*) Yes—I s'pose I ought. (*After a pause—a*

sudden suspicion forming in her mind) What did Rob tell you —about me?

ANDREW. Tell? About you? Why, nothing.

RUTH. (*staring at him intensely*) Are you telling me the truth, Andy Mayo? Didn't he say—I—— (*She stops confusedly*).

ANDREW. (*surprised*) No, he didn't mention you, I can remember. Why? What made you think he did?

RUTH. (*wringing her hands*) Oh, I wish I could tell if you're lying or not!

ANDREW. (*indignantly*) What're you talking about? I didn't used to lie to you, did I? And what in the name of God is there to lie for?

RUTH. (*still unconvinced*) Are you sure—will you swear—it isn't the reason—— (*She lowers her eyes and half turns away from him*) The same reason that made you go last time that's driving you away again? 'Cause if it is—I was going to say—you mustn't go—on that account. (*Her voice sinks to a tremulous, tender whisper as she finishes*).

ANDREW. (*confused—forces a laugh*) Oh, is *that* what you're driving at? Well, you needn't worry about that no more—— (*Soberly*) I don't blame you, Ruth, feeling embarrassed having me around again, after the way I played the dumb fool about going away last time.

RUTH. (*her hope crushed—with a gasp of pain*) Oh, Andy!

ANDREW. (*misunderstanding*) I know I oughtn't to talk about such foolishness to you. Still I figure it's better to get it out of my system so's we three can be together same's years ago, and not be worried thinking one of us might have the wrong notion

RUTH. Andy! Please! Don't!

ANDREW. Let me finish now that I've started. It'll help clear things up. I don't want you to think once a fool always a fool, and be upset all the time I'm here on my fool account. I want you to believe I put all that silly nonsense back of me a long time ago—and now—it seems—well—as if you'd always been my sister, that's what, Ruth.

RUTH. (*at the end of her endurance—laughing hysterically*) For God's sake, Andy—won't you please stop talking! (*She again hides her face in her hands, her bowed shoulders trembling*).

ANDREW. (*ruefully*) Seem's if I put my foot in it whenever I open my mouth today. Rob shut me up with almost the same words when I tried speaking to him about it.

RUTH. (*fiercely*) You told him—what you've told me?

ANDREW. (*astounded*) Why sure! Why not?

RUTH. (*shuddering*) Oh, my God!

ANDREW. (*alarmed*) Why? Shouldn't I have?

RUTH. (*hysterically*) Oh, I don't care what you do! I don't care! Leave me alone! (ANDREW *gets up and walks down the hill to the left, embarrassed, hurt, and greatly puzzled by her behavior*).

ANDREW. (*after a pause—pointing down the hill*) Hello! Here they come back—and the Captain's with them. How'd he come to get back so soon, I wonder? That means I've got to hustle down to the port and get on board. Rob's got the baby with him. (*He comes back to the boulder.* RUTH keeps *her face averted from him*) Gosh, I never saw a father so tied up in a kid as Rob is! He just watches every move she makes. And I don't blame him. You both got a right to feel

proud of her. She's surely a little winner. (*He glances at* RUTH *to see if this very obvious attempt to get back in her good graces is having any effect*) I can see the likeness to Rob standing out all over her, can't you? But there's no denying she's your young one, either. There's something about her eyes——

RUTH. (*piteously*) Oh, Andy, I've a headache! I don't want to talk! Leave me alone, won't you please?

ANDREW. (*stands staring at her for a moment—then walks away saying in a hurt tone*): Everybody hereabouts seems to be on edge today. I begin to feel as if I'm not wanted around. (*He stands near the path, left, kicking at the grass with the toe of his shoe. A moment later* CAPTAIN DICK SCOTT *enters, followed by* ROBERT *carrying* MARY. *The* CAPTAIN *seems scarcely to have changed at all from the jovial, booming person he was three years before. He wears a uniform similar to* ANDREW'S. *He is puffing and breathless from his climb and mops wildly at his perspiring countenance.* ROBERT *casts a quick glance at* ANDREW, *noticing the latter's discomfited look, and then turns his eyes on* RUTH *who, at their approach, has moved so her back is toward them, her chin resting on her hands as she stares out seaward*).

MARY. Mama! Mama! (ROBERT *puts her down and she runs to her mother.* RUTH *turns and grabs her up in her arms with a sudden fierce tenderness, quickly turning away again from the others. During the following scene she keeps* MARY *in her arms*).

SCOTT. (*wheezily*) Phew! I got great news for you, Andy. Let me get my wind first. Phew! God A'mighty, mountin' this damned hill is worser'n goin' aloft to the skys'l yard in a

blow. I got to lay to a while. (*He sits down on the grass, mopping his face*).

ANDREW. I didn't look for you this soon, Uncle.

SCOTT. I didn't figger it, neither; but I run across a bit o' news down to the Seamen's Home made me 'bout ship and set all sail back here to find you.

ANDREW. (*eagerly*) What is it, Uncle?

SCOTT. Passin' by the Home I thought I'd drop in an' let 'em know I'd be lackin' a mate next trip count o' your leavin'. Their man in charge o' the shippin' asked after you 'special curious. "Do you think he'd consider a berth as Second on a steamer, Captain?" he asks. I was goin' to say no when I thinks o' you wantin' to get back down south to the Plate agen; so I asks him: "What is she and where's she bound?" "She's the *El Paso,* a brand new tramp," he says, "and she's bound for Buenos Aires."

ANDREW. (*his eyes lighting up—excitedly*) Gosh, that is luck! When does she sail?

SCOTT. Tomorrow mornin'. I didn't know if you'd want to ship away agen so quick an' I told him so. "Tell him I'll hold the berth open for him until late this afternoon," he says. So there you be, an' you can make your own choice.

ANDREW. I'd like to take it. There may not be another ship for Buenos Aires with a vacancy in months. (*His eyes roving from* ROBERT *to* RUTH *and back again—uncertainly*) Still—damn it all—tomorrow morning *is* soon. I wish she wasn't leaving for a week or so. That'd give me a chance—it seems hard to go right away again when I've just got home. And yet it's a chance in a thousand—— (*Appealing to* ROBERT) What do you think, Rob? What would you do?

ROBERT. (*forcing a smile*) He who hesitates, you know. (*Frowning*) It's a piece of good luck thrown in your way—and—I think you owe it to yourself to jump at it. But don't ask me to decide for you.

RUTH. (*turning to look at* ANDREW—*in a tone of fierce resentment*) Yes, go, Andy! (*She turns quickly away again. There is a moment of embarrassed silence*).

ANDREW. (*thoughtfully*) Yes, I guess I will. It'll be the best thing for all of us in the end, don't you think so, Rob? (ROBERT *nods but remains silent*).

SCOTT. (*getting to his feet*) Then, that's settled.

ANDREW. (*now that he has definitely made a decision his voice rings with hopeful strength and energy*) Yes, I'll take the berth. The sooner I go the sooner I'll be back, that's a certainty; and I won't come back with empty hands next time. You bet I won't!

SCOTT. You ain't got so much time, Andy. To make sure you'd best leave here soon's you kin. I got to get right back aboard. You'd best come with me.

ANDREW. I'll go to the house and repack my bag right away.

ROBERT. (*quietly*) You'll both be here for dinner, won't you?

ANDREW. (*worriedly*) I don't know. Will there be time? What time is it now, I wonder?

ROBERT. (*reproachfully*) Ma's been getting dinner especially for you, Andy.

ANDREW. (*flushing—shamefacedly*) Hell! And I was forgetting! Of course I'll stay for dinner if I missed every damned ship in the world. (*He turns to the* CAPTAIN—*briskly*) Come on, Uncle. Walk down with me to the house and you can tell

me more about this berth on the way. I've got to pack before dinner. (*He and the* CAPTAIN *start down to the left.* ANDREW *calls back over his shoulder*) You're coming soon, aren't you, Rob?

ROBERT. Yes. I'll be right down. (ANDREW *and the* CAPTAIN *leave.* RUTH *puts* MARY *on the ground and hides her face in her hands. Her shoulders shake as if she were sobbing.* ROBERT *stares at her with a grim, somber expression.* MARY *walks backward toward* ROBERT, *her wondering eyes fixed on her mother*).

MARY. (*her voice vaguely frightened, taking her father's hand*) Dada, Mama's cryin', Dada.

ROBERT. (*bending down and stroking her hair—in a voice he endeavors to keep from being harsh*) No, she isn't, little girl. The sun hurts her eyes, that's all. Aren't you beginning to feel hungry, Mary?

MARY. (*decidedly*) Yes, Dada.

ROBERT. (*meaningly*) It must be your dinner time now.

RUTH. (*in a muffled voice*) I'm coming, Mary. (*She wipes her eyes quickly and, without looking at* ROBERT, *comes and takes* MARY's *hand—in a dead voice*) Come on and I'll get your dinner for you. (*She walks out left, her eyes fixed on the ground, the skipping* MARY *tugging at her hand.* ROBERT *waits a moment for them to get ahead and then slowly follows as*

(*The Curtain Falls*)

BEYOND THE HORIZON

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

Scene One

Same as Act Two, Scene One—The sitting room of the farm house about six o'clock in the morning of a day toward the end of October five years later. It is not yet dawn, but as the action progresses the darkness outside the windows gradually fades to gray.

The room, seen by the light of the shadeless oil lamp with a smoky chimney which stands on the table, presents an appearance of decay, of dissolution. The curtains at the windows are torn and dirty and one of them is missing. The closed desk is gray with accumulated dust as if it had not been used in years. Blotches of dampness disfigure the wall paper. Threadbare trails, leading to the kitchen and outer doors, show in the faded carpet. The top of the coverless table is stained with the imprints of hot dishes and spilt food. The rung of one rocker has been clumsily mended with a piece of plain board. A brown coating of rust covers the unblacked stove. A pile of wood is stacked up carelessly against the wall by the stove.

The whole atmosphere of the room, contrasted with that of former years, is one of an habitual poverty too hopelessly resigned to be any longer ashamed or even conscious of itself.

At the rise of the curtain RUTH *is discovered sitting by the stove, with hands outstretched to the warmth as if the air in the room were damp and cold. A heavy shawl is wrapped about her shoulders, half-concealing her dress of deep mourning. She*

has aged horribly. Her pale, deeply lined face has the stony lack of expression of one to whom nothing more can ever happen, whose capacity for emotion has been exhausted. When she speaks her voice is without timbre, low and monotonous. The negligent disorder of her dress, the slovenly arrangement of her hair, now streaked with gray, her muddied shoes run down at the heel, give full evidence of the apathy in which she lives.

Her mother is asleep in her wheel chair beside the stove toward the rear, wrapped up in a blanket.

There is a sound from the open bedroom door in the rear as if someone were getting out of bed. RUTH *turns in that direction with a look of dull annoyance. A moment later* ROBERT *appears in the doorway, leaning weakly against it for support. His hair is long and unkempt, his face and body emaciated. There are bright patches of crimson over his cheek bones and his eyes are burning with fever. He is dressed in corduroy pants, a flannel shirt, and wears worn carpet slippers on his bare feet.*

RUTH. (*dully*) S-s-s-h-! Ma's asleep.

ROBERT. (*speaking with an effort*) I won't wake her. (*He walks weakly to a rocker by the side of the table and sinks down in it exhausted*).

RUTH. (*staring at the stove*) You better come near the fire where it's warm.

ROBERT. No. I'm burning up now.

RUTH. That's the fever. You know the doctor told you not to get up and move round.

ROBERT. (*irritably*) That old fossil! He doesn't know anything. Go to bed and stay there—that's his only prescription.

RUTH. (*indifferently*) How are you feeling now?

ROBERT. (*buoyantly*) Better! Much better than I've felt in ages. Really I'm fine now—only very weak. It's the turning point, I guess. From now on I'll pick up so quick I'll surprise you—and no thanks to that old fool of a country quack, either.

RUTH. He's always tended to us.

ROBERT. Always helped us to die, you mean! He "tended" to Pa and Ma and—(*his voice breaks*)—and to—Mary.

RUTH. (*dully*) He did the best he knew, I s'pose. (*After a pause*) Well, Andy's bringing a specialist with him when he comes. That ought to suit you.

ROBERT. (*bitterly*) Is that why you're waiting up all night?

RUTH. Yes.

ROBERT. For Andy?

RUTH. (*without a trace of feeling*) Somebody had got to. It's only right for someone to meet him after he's been gone five years.

ROBERT. (*with bitter mockery*) Five years! It's a long time.

RUTH. Yes.

ROBERT. (*meaningly*) To *wait!*

RUTH. (*indifferently*) It's past now.

ROBERT. Yes, it's past. (*After a pause*) Have you got his two telegrams with you? (RUTH *nods*) Let me see them, will you? My head was so full of fever when they came I couldn't make head or tail to them. (*Hastily*) But I'm feeling fine now. Let me read them again. (RUTH *takes them from the bosom of her dress and hands them to him*).

RUTH. Here. The first one's on top.

ROBERT. (*opening it*) New York. "Just landed from

steamer. Have important business to wind up here. Will be home as soon as deal is completed." (*He smiles bitterly*) Business first was always Andy's motto (*He reads*) "Hope you are all well. Andy." (*He repeats ironically*) "Hope you are all well!"

RUTH. (*dully*) He couldn't know you'd been took sick till I answered that and told him.

ROBERT. (*contritely*) Of course he couldn't. I'm a fool. I'm touchy about nothing lately. Just what did you say in your reply?

RUTH. (*inconsequentially*) I had to send it collect.

ROBERT. (*irritably*) What did you say was the matter with me?

RUTH. I wrote you had lung trouble.

ROBERT. (*flying into a petty temper*) You *are* a fool! How often have I explained to you that it's *pleurisy* is the matter with me. You can't seem to get it in your head that the pleura is outside the lungs, not in them!

RUTH. (*callously*) I only wrote what Doctor Smith told me.

ROBERT. (*angrily*) He's a damned ignoramus!

RUTH. (*dully*) Makes no difference. I had to tell Andy something, didn't I?

ROBERT. (*after a pause, opening the other telegram*) He sent this last evening. Let's see. (*He reads*) "Leave for home on midnight train. Just received your wire. Am bringing specialist to see Rob. Will motor to farm from Port." (*He calculates*) What time is it now?

RUTH. Round six, must be.

ROBERT. He ought to be here soon. I'm glad he's bringing

a doctor who knows something. A specialist will tell you in a second that there's nothing the matter with my lungs.

RUTH. (*stolidly*) You've been coughing an awful lot lately.

ROBERT. (*irritably*) What nonsense! For God's sake, haven't you ever had a bad cold yourself? (RUTH *stares at the stove in silence.* ROBERT *fidgets in his chair. There is a pause. Finally* ROBERT'S *eyes are fixed on the sleeping* MRS. ATKINS) Your mother is lucky to be able to sleep so soundly.

RUTH. Ma's tired. She's been sitting up with me most of the night.

ROBERT. (*mockingly*) Is she waiting for Andy, too? (*There is a pause.* ROBERT *sighs*) I couldn't get to sleep to save my soul. I counted ten million sheep if I counted one. No use! I gave up trying finally and just laid there in the dark thinking. (*He pauses, then continues in a tone of tender sympathy*) I was thinking about you, Ruth—of how hard these last years must have been for you. (*Appealingly*) I'm sorry, Ruth.

RUTH. (*in a dead voice*) I don't know. They're past now. They were hard on all of us.

ROBERT. Yes; on all of us but Andy. (*With a flash of sick jealousy*) Andy's made a big success of himself—the kind he wanted. (*Mockingly*) And now he's coming home to let us admire his greatness. (*Frowning—irritably*) What am I talking about? My brain must be sick, too. (*After a pause*) Yes, these years have been terrible for both of us. (*His voice is lowered to a trembling whisper*) Especially the last eight months since Mary—died. (*He forces back a sob with a convulsive shudder—then breaks out in a passionate agony*) Our last hope of happiness! I could curse God from the bottom of my soul—if there was a God! (*He is racked by a violent*

fit of coughing and hurriedly puts his handkerchief to his lips).

RUTH. (*without looking at him*) Mary's better off—being dead.

ROBERT. (*gloomily*) We'd all be better off for that matter. (*With a sudden exasperation*) You tell that mother of yours she's got to stop saying that Mary's death was due to a weak constitution inherited from me. (*On the verge of tears of weakness*) It's got to stop, I tell you!

RUTH. (*sharply*) S-h-h! You'll wake her; and then she'll nag at me—not you.

ROBERT. (*coughs and lies back in his chair weakly—a pause*) It's all because your mother's down on me for not begging Andy for help.

RUTH. (*resentfully*) You might have. He's got plenty.

ROBERT. How can *you* of all people think of taking money from *him?*

RUTH. (*dully*) I don't see the harm. He's your own brother.

ROBERT. (*shrugging his shoulders*) What's the use of talking to you? Well, *I* couldn't. (*Proudly*) And I've managed to keep things going, thank God. You can't deny that without help I've succeeded in—— (*He breaks off with a bitter laugh*) My God, what am I boasting of? Debts to this one and that, taxes, interest unpaid! I'm a fool! (*He lies back in his chair closing his eyes for a moment, then speaks in a low voice*) I'll be frank, Ruth. I've been an utter failure, and I've dragged you with me. I couldn't blame you in all justice—for hating me.

RUTH. (*without feeling*) I don't hate you. It's been my fault too, I s'pose.

ROBERT. No. You couldn't help loving—Andy.

RUTH. (*dully*) I don't love anyone.

ROBERT. (*waving her remark aside*) You needn't deny it. It doesn't matter. (*After a pause—with a tender smile*) Do you know Ruth, what I've been dreaming back there in the dark? (*With a short laugh*) I was planning our future when I get well. (*He looks at her with appealing eyes as if afraid she will sneer at him. Her expression does not change. She stares at the stove. His voice takes on a note of eagerness*) After all, why shouldn't we have a future? We're young yet. If we can only shake off the curse of this farm! It's the farm that's ruined our lives, damn it! And now that Andy's coming back—I'm going to sink my foolish pride, Ruth! I'll borrow the money from him to give us a good start in the city. We'll go where people live instead of stagnating, and start all over again. (*Confidently*) I won't be the failure there that I've been here, Ruth. You won't need to be ashamed of me there. I'll prove to you the reading I've done can be put to some use. (*Vaguely*) I'll write, or something of that sort. I've always wanted to write. (*Pleadingly*) You'll want to do that, won't you, Ruth?

RUTH. (*dully*) There's Ma.

ROBERT. She can come with us.

RUTH. She wouldn't.

ROBERT. (*angrily*) So that's your answer! (*He trembles with violent passion. His voice is so strange that* RUTH *turns to look at him in alarm*) You're lying, Ruth! Your mother's just an excuse. You want to stay here. You think that because Andy's coming back that—— (*He chokes and has an attack of coughing*).

RUTH. (*getting up—in a frightened voice*) What's the matter? (*She goes to him*) I'll go with you, Rob. Stop that coughing for goodness' sake! It's awful bad for you. (*She soothes him in dull tones*) I'll go with you to the city—soon's you're well again. Honest I will, Rob, I promise! (ROB *lies back and closes his eyes. She stands looking down at him anxiously*) Do you feel better now?

ROBERT. Yes. (RUTH *goes back to her chair. After a pause he opens his eyes and sits up in his chair. His face is flushed and happy*) Then you *will* go, Ruth?

RUTH. Yes.

ROBERT. (*excitedly*) We'll make a new start, Ruth—just you and I. Life owes us some happiness after what we've been through. (*Vehemently*) It must! Otherwise our suffering would be meaningless—and that is unthinkable.

RUTH. (*worried by his excitement*) Yes, yes, of course, Rob, but you mustn't——

ROBERT. Oh, don't be afraid. I feel completely well, really I do—now that I can hope again. Oh if you knew how glorious it feels to have something to look forward to! Can't you feel the thrill of it, too—the vision of a new life opening up after all the horrible years?

RUTH. Yes, yes, but do be——

ROBERT. Nonsense! I won't be careful. I'm getting back all my strength. (*He gets lightly to his feet*) See! I feel light as a feather. (*He walks to her chair and bends down to kiss her smilingly*) One kiss—the first in years, isn't it?—to greet the dawn of a new life together.

RUTH. (*submitting to his kiss—worriedly*) Sit down, Rob, for goodness' sake!

ROBERT. (*with tender obstinacy—stroking her hair*) I won't sit down. You're silly to worry. (*He rests one hand on the back of her chair*) Listen. All our suffering has been a test through which we had to pass to prove ourselves worthy of a finer realization. (*Exultingly*) And we did pass through it! It hasn't broken us! And now the dream is to come true! Don't you see?

RUTH. (*looking at him with frightened eyes as if she thought he had gone mad*) Yes, Rob, I see; but won't you go back to bed now and rest?

ROBERT. No. I'm going to see the sun rise. It's an augury of good fortune. (*He goes quickly to the window in the rear left, and pushing the curtains aside, stands looking out.* RUTH *springs to her feet and comes quickly to the table, left, where she remains watching* ROBERT *in a tense, expectant attitude. As he peers out his body seems gradually to sag, to grow limp and tired. His voice is mournful as he speaks*) No sun yet. It isn't time. All I can see is the black rim of the damned hills outlined against a creeping grayness. (*He turns around; letting the curtains fall back, stretching a hand out to the wall to support himself. His false strength of a moment has evaporated leaving his face drawn and hollow-eyed. He makes a pitiful attempt to smile*) That's not a very happy augury, is it? But the sun'll come—soon. (*He sways weakly*).

RUTH. (*hurrying to his side and supporting him*) Please go to bed, won't you, Rob? You don't want to be all wore out when the specialist comes, do you?

ROBERT. (*quickly*) No. That's right. He mustn't think I'm sicker than I am. And I feel as if I could sleep now—(*Cheerfully*)—a good, sound, restful sleep.

RUTH. (*helping him to the bedroom door*) That's what you need most. (*They go inside. A moment later she reappears calling back*) I'll shut this door so's you'll be quiet. (*She closes the door and goes quickly to her mother and shakes her by the shoulder*) Ma! Ma! Wake up!

MRS. ATKINS. (*coming out of her sleep with a start*) Glory be! What's the matter with you?

RUTH. It was Rob. He's just been talking to me out here. I put him back to bed. (*Now that she is sure her mother is awake her fear passes and she relapses into dull indifference. She sits down in her chair and stares at the stove—dully*) He acted—funny; and his eyes looked so—so wild like.

MRS. ATKINS. (*with asperity*) And is that all you woke me out of a sound sleep for, and scared me near out of my wits?

RUTH. I was afraid. He talked so crazy. I couldn't quiet him. I didn't want to be alone with him that way. Lord knows what he might do.

MRS. ATKINS. (*scornfully*) Humph! A help I'd be to you and me not able to move a step! Why didn't you run and get Jake?

RUTH. (*dully*) Jake isn't here. He quit last night. He hasn't been paid in three months.

MRS. ATKINS. (*indignantly*) I can't blame him. What decent person'd want to work on a place like this? (*With sudden exasperation*) Oh, I wish you'd never married that man!

RUTH. (*wearily*) You oughtn't to talk about him now when he's sick in his bed.

MRS. ATKINS. (*working herself into a fit of rage*) You know very well, Ruth Mayo, if it wasn't for me helpin' you on the sly out of my savin's, you'd both been in the poor house—and

all 'count of his pigheaded pride in not lettin' Andy know the state thin's were in. A nice thin' for me to have to support him out of what I'd saved for my last days—and me an invalid with no one to look to!

RUTH. Andy'll pay you back, Ma. I can tell him so's Rob'll never know.

MRS. ATKINS. (*with a snort*) What'd Rob think you and him was livin' on, I'd like to know?

RUTH. (*dully*) He didn't think about it, I s'pose. (*After a slight pause*) He said he'd made up his mind to ask Andy for help when he comes. (*As a clock in the kitchen strikes six*) Six o'clock. Andy ought to get here directly.

MRS. ATKINS. D'you think this special doctor'll do Rob any good?

RUTH. (*hopelessly*) I don't know. (*The two women remain silent for a time staring dejectedly at the stove*).

MRS. ATKINS. (*shivering irritably*) For goodness' sake put some wood on that fire. I'm most freezin'!

RUTH. (*pointing to the door in the rear*) Don't talk so loud. Let him sleep if he can. (*She gets wearily from the chair and puts a few pieces of wood in the stove*) This is the last of the wood. I don't know who'll cut more now that Jake's left. (*She sighs and walks to the window in the rear, left, pulls the curtains aside, and looks out*) It's getting gray out. (*She comes back to the stove*) Looks like it'd be a nice day. (*She stretches out her hands to warm them*) Must've been a heavy frost last night. We're paying for the spell of warm weather we've been having. (*The throbbing whine of a motor sounds from the distance outside*).

MRS. ATKINS. (*sharply*) S-h-h! Listen! Ain't that an auto I hear?

RUTH. (*without interest*) Yes. It's Andy, I s'pose.

MRS. ATKINS. (*with nervous irritation*) Don't sit there like a silly goose. Look at the state of this room! What'll this strange doctor think of us? Look at that lamp chimney all smoke! Gracious sakes, Ruth——

RUTH. (*indifferently*) I've got a lamp all cleaned up in the kitchen.

MRS. ATKINS. (*peremptorily*) Wheel me in there this minute. I don't want him to see me looking a sight. I'll lay down in the room the other side. You don't need me now and I'm dead for sleep. (RUTH *wheels her mother off right. The noise of the motor grows louder and finally ceases as the car stops on the road before the farmhouse.* RUTH *returns from the kitchen with a lighted lamp in her hand which she sets on the table beside the other. The sound of footsteps on the path is heard—then a sharp rap on the door.* RUTH *goes and opens it.* ANDREW *enters, followed by* DOCTOR FAWCETT *carrying a small black bag.* ANDREW *has changed greatly. His face seems to have grown highstrung, hardened by the look of decisiveness which comes from being constantly under a strain where judgments on the spur of the moment are compelled to be accurate. His eyes are keener and more alert. There is even a suggestion of ruthless cunning about them. At present, however, his expression is one of tense anxiety.* DOCTOR FAWCETT *is a short, dark, middle-aged man with a Vandyke beard. He wears glasses*).

RUTH. Hello, Andy! I've been waiting——

ANDREW. (*kissing her hastily*) I got here as soon as I could.

(*He throws off his cap and heavy overcoat on the table, introducing* RUTH *and the* DOCTOR *as he does so. He is dressed in an expensive business suit and appears stouter*) My sister-in-law, Mrs. Mayo—Doctor Fawcett. (*They bow to each other silently.* ANDREW *casts a quick glance about the room*) Where's Rob?

RUTH. (*pointing*) In there.

ANDREW. I'll take your coat and hat, Doctor. (*As he helps the* DOCTOR *with his things*) Is he very bad, Ruth?

RUTH. (*dully*) He's been getting weaker.

ANDREW. Damn! This way, Doctor. Bring the lamp, Ruth. (*He goes into the bedroom, followed by the* DOCTOR *and* RUTH *carrying the clean lamp.* RUTH *reappears almost immediately closing the door behind her, and goes slowly to the outside door, which she opens, and stands in the doorway looking out. The sound of* ANDREW'S *and* ROBERT'S *voices comes from the bedroom. A moment later* ANDREW *re-enters, closing the door softly. He comes forward and sinks down in the rocker on the right of table, leaning his head on his hand. His face is drawn in a shocked expression of great grief. He sighs heavily, staring mournfully in front of him.* RUTH *turns and stands watching him. Then she shuts the door and returns to her chair by the stove, turning it so she can face him*).

ANDREW. (*glancing up quickly—in a harsh voice*) How long has this been going on?

RUTH. You mean—how long has he been sick?

ANDREW. (*shortly*) Of course! What else?

RUTH. It was last summer he had a bad spell first, but he's been ailin' ever since Mary died—eight months ago.

ANDREW. (*harshly*) Why didn't you let me know—cable me? Do you want him to die, all of you? I'm damned if it

doesn't look that way! (*His voice breaking*) Poor old chap! To be sick in this out-of-the-way hole without anyone to attend to him but a country quack! It's a damned shame!

RUTH. (*dully*) I wanted to send you word once, but he only got mad when I told him. He was too proud to ask anything, he said.

ANDREW. Proud? To ask *me?* (*He jumps to his feet and paces nervously back and forth*) I can't understand the way you've acted. Didn't you see how sick he was getting? Couldn't you realize—why, I nearly dropped in my tracks when I saw him! He looks—(*He shudders*)—terrible! (*With fierce scorn*) I suppose you're so used to the idea of his being delicate that you took his sickness as a matter of course. God, if I'd only known!

RUTH. (*without emotion*) A letter takes so long to get where you were—and we couldn't afford to telegraph. We owed everyone already, and I couldn't ask Ma. She'd been giving me money out of her savings till she hadn't much left. Don't say anything to Rob about it. I never told him. He'd only be mad at me if he knew. But I had to, because—God knows how we'd have got on if I hadn't.

ANDREW. You mean to say—— (*His eyes seem to take in the poverty-stricken appearance of the room for the first time*) You sent that telegram to me collect. Was it because—— (RUTH *nods silently.* ANDREW *pounds on the table with his fist*) Good God! And all this time I've been—why I've had everything! (*He sits down in his chair and pulls it close to* RUTH'S—*impulsively*) But—I can't get it through my head. Why? Why? What has happened? How did it ever come about? Tell me!

RUTH. (*dully*) There's nothing much to tell. Things kept getting worse, that's all—and Rob didn't seem to care. He never took any interest since way back when your Ma died. After that he got men to take charge, and they nearly all cheated him—he couldn't tell—and left one after another. Then after Mary died he didn't pay no heed to anything any more—just stayed indoors and took to reading books again. So I had to ask Ma if she wouldn't help us some.

ANDREW. (*surprised and horrified*) Why, damn it, this is frightful! Rob must be mad not to have let me know. Too proud to ask help of *me!* What's the matter with him in God's name? (*A sudden, horrible suspicion entering his mind*) Ruth! Tell me the truth. His mind hasn't gone back on him, has it?

RUTH. (*dully*) I don't know. Mary's dying broke him up terrible—but he's used to her being gone by this, I s'pose.

ANDREW. (*looking at her queerly*) Do you mean to say *you're* used to it?

RUTH. (*in a dead tone*) There's a time comes—when you don't mind any more—anything.

ANDREW. (*looks at her fixedly for a moment—with great pity*) I'm sorry, Ruth—if I seemed to blame you. I didn't realize—— The sight of Rob lying in bed there, so gone to pieces—it made me furious at everyone. Forgive me, Ruth.

RUTH. There's nothing to forgive. It doesn't matter.

ANDREW. (*springing to his feet again and pacing up and down*) Thank God I came back before it was too late. This doctor will know exactly what to do. That's the first thing to think of. When Rob's on his feet again we can get the farm working on a sound basis once more. I'll see to that—before I leave.

RUTH. You're going away again?

ANDREW. I've got to.

RUTH. You wrote Rob you was coming back to stay this time.

ANDREW. I expected to—until I got to New York. Then I learned certain facts that make it necessary. (*With a short laugh*) To be candid, Ruth, I'm not the rich man you've probably been led to believe by my letters—not now. I was when I wrote them. I made money hand over fist as long as I stuck to legitimate trading; but I wasn't content with that. I wanted it to come easier, so like all the rest of the idiots, I tried speculation. Oh, I won all right! Several times I've been almost a millionaire—on paper—and then come down to earth again with a bump. Finally the strain was too much. I got disgusted with myself and made up my mind to get out and come home and forget it and really live again. (*He gives a harsh laugh*) And now comes the funny part. The day before the steamer sailed I saw what I thought was a chance to become a millionaire again. (*He snaps his fingers*) That easy! I plunged. Then, before things broke, I left—I was so confident I couldn't be wrong. But when I landed in New York—I wired you I had business to wind up, didn't I? Well, it was the business that wound me up! (*He smiles grimly, pacing up and down, his hands in his pockets*).

RUTH. (*dully*) You found—you'd lost everything?

ANDREW. (*sitting down again*) Practically. (*He takes a cigar from his pocket, bites the end off, and lights it*) Oh, I don't mean I'm dead broke. I've saved ten thousand from the wreckage, maybe twenty. But that's a poor showing for five years' hard work. That's why I'll have to go back. (*Confi-*

dently) I can make it up in a year or so down there—and I don't need but a shoestring to start with. (*A weary expression comes over his face and he sighs heavily*) I wish I didn't have to. I'm sick of it all.

RUTH. It's too bad—things seem to go wrong so.

ANDREW. (*shaking off his depression—briskly*) They might be much worse. There's enough left to fix the farm O. K. before I go. I won't leave 'til Rob's on his feet again. In the meantime I'll make things fly around here. (*With satisfaction*) I need a rest, and the kind of rest I need is hard work in the open—just like I used to do in the old days. (*Stopping abruptly and lowering his voice cautiously*) Not a word to Rob about my losing money! Remember that, Ruth! You can see why. If he's grown so touchy he'd never accept a cent if he thought I was hard up; see?

RUTH. Yes, Andy. (*After a pause, during which* ANDREW *puffs at his cigar abstractedly, his mind evidently busy with plans for the future, the bedroom door is opened and* DOCTOR FAWCETT *enters, carrying a bag. He closes the door quietly behind him and comes forward, a grave expression on his face.* ANDREW *springs out of his chair*).

ANDREW. Ah, Doctor! (*He pushes a chair between his own and* RUTH's) Won't you have a chair?

FAWCETT. (*glancing at his watch*) I must catch the nine o'clock back to the city. It's imperative. I have only a moment. (*Sitting down and clearing his throat—in a perfunctory, impersonal voice*) The case of your brother, Mr. Mayo, is—— (*He stops and glances at* RUTH *and says meaningly to* ANDREW) Perhaps it would be better if you and I——

RUTH. (*with dogged resentment*) I know what you mean,

Doctor. (*Dully*) Don't be afraid I can't stand it. I'm used to bearing trouble by this; and I can guess what you've found out. (*She hesitates for a moment—then continues in a monotonous voice*) Rob's going to die.

ANDREW. (*angrily*) Ruth!

FAWCETT. (*raising his hand as if to command silence*) I am afraid my diagnosis of your brother's condition forces me to the same conclusion as Mrs. Mayo's.

ANDREW. (*groaning*) But, Doctor, surely——

FAWCETT. (*calmly*) Your brother hasn't long to live—perhaps a few days, perhaps only a few hours. It's a marvel that he's alive at this moment. My examination revealed that both of his lungs are terribly affected.

ANDREW. (*brokenly*) Good God! (RUTH *keeps her eyes fixed on her lap in a trance-like stare*).

FAWCETT. I am sorry I have to tell you this. If there was anything that could be done——

ANDREW. There isn't anything?

FAWCETT. (*shaking his head*) It's too late. Six months ago there might have——

ANDREW. (*in anguish*) But if we were to take him to the mountains—or to Arizona—or——

FAWCETT. That might have prolonged his life six months ago. (ANDREW *groans*) But now—— (*He shrugs his shoulders significantly*).

ANDREW. (*appalled by a sudden thought*) Good heavens, you haven't told him this, have you, Doctor?

FAWCETT. No. I lied to him. I said a change of climate—— (*He looks at his watch again nervously*) I must leave you. (*He gets up*).

ANDREW. (*getting to his feet—insistently*) But there must still be some chance——

FAWCETT. (*as if he were reassuring a child*) There is always that last chance—the miracle. (*He puts on his hat and coat—bowing to* RUTH) Good-by, Mrs. Mayo.

RUTH. (*without raising her eyes—dully*) Good-by.

ANDREW. (*mechanically*) I'll walk to the car with you, Doctor. (*They go out of the door.* RUTH *sits motionlessly. The motor is heard starting and the noise gradually recedes into the distance.* ANDREW *re-enters and sits down in his chair, holding his head in his hands*) Ruth! (*She lifts her eyes to his*) Hadn't we better go in and see him? God! I'm afraid to! I know he'll read it in my face. (*The bedroom door is noiselessly opened and* ROBERT *appears in the doorway. His cheeks are flushed with fever, and his eyes appear unusually large and brilliant.* ANDREW *continues with a groan*) It can't be, Ruth. It can't be as hopeless as he said. There's always a fighting chance. We'll take Rob to Arizona. He's *got* to get well. There *must* be a chance!

ROBERT. (*in a gentle tone*) Why must there, Andy? (RUTH *turns and stares at him with terrified eyes*).

ANDREW. (*whirling around*) Rob! (*Scoldingly*) What are you doing out of bed? (*He gets up and goes to him*) Get right back now and obey the Doc, or you're going to get a licking from me!

ROBERT. (*ignoring these remarks*) Help me over to the chair, please, Andy.

ANDREW. Like hell I will! You're going right back to bed, that's where you're going, and stay there! (*He takes hold of* ROBERT'S *arm*).

ROBERT. (*mockingly*) Stay there 'til I die, eh, Andy? (*Coldly*) Don't behave like a child. I'm sick of lying down. I'll be more rested sitting up. (*As* ANDREW *hesitates—violently*) I swear I'll get out of bed every time you put me there. You'll have to sit on my chest, and that wouldn't help my health any. Come on, Andy. Don't play the fool. I want to talk to you, and I'm going to. (*With a grim smile*) A dying man has some rights, hasn't he?

ANDREW. (*with a shudder*) Don't talk that way, for God's sake! I'll only let you sit down if you'll promise that. Remember. (*He helps* ROBERT *to the chair between his own and* RUTH'S) Easy now! There you are! Wait, and I'll get a pillow for you. (*He goes into the bedroom.* ROBERT *looks at* RUTH *who shrinks away from him in terror.* ROBERT *smiles bitterly.* ANDREW *comes back with the pillow which he places behind* ROBERT'S *back*) How's that?

ROBERT. (*with an affectionate smile*) Fine! Thank you! (*As* ANDREW *sits down*) Listen, Andy. You've asked me not to talk—and I won't after I've made my position clear. (*Slowly*) In the first place I know I'm dying. (RUTH *bows her head and covers her face with her hands. She remains like this all during the scene between the two brothers*).

ANDREW. Rob! That isn't so!

ROBERT. (*wearily*) It *is* so! Don't lie to me. After Ruth put me to bed before you came, I saw it clearly for the first time. (*Bitterly*) I'd been making plans for our future—Ruth's and mine—so it came hard at first—the realization. Then when the doctor examined me, I knew—although he tried to lie about it. And then to make sure I listened at the door to what he told you. So don't mock me with fairy tales about

Arizona, or any such rot as that. Because I'm dying is no reason you should treat me as an imbecile or a coward. Now that I'm sure what's happening I can say Kismet to it with all my heart. It was only the silly uncertainty that hurt. (*There is a pause.* ANDREW *looks around in impotent anguish, not knowing what to say.* ROBERT *regards him with an affectionate smile*).

ANDREW. (*finally blurts out*) It isn't foolish. You *have* got a chance. If you heard all the Doctor said that ought to prove it to you.

ROBERT. Oh, you mean when he spoke of the miracle? (*Dryly*) I don't believe in miracles—in my case. Besides, I know more than any doctor on earth *could* know—because I *feel* what's coming. (*Dismissing the subject*) But we've agreed not to talk of it. Tell me about yourself, Andy. That's what I'm interested in. Your letters were too brief and far apart to be illuminating.

ANDREW. I meant to write oftener.

ROBERT. (*with a faint trace of irony*) I judge from them you've accomplished all you set out to do five years ago?

ANDREW. That isn't much to boast of.

ROBERT. (*surprised*) Have you really, honestly reached that conclusion?

ANDREW. Well, it doesn't seem to amount to much now.

ROBERT. But you're rich, aren't you?

ANDREW. (*with a quick glance at* RUTH) Yes, I s'pose so.

ROBERT. I'm glad. You can do to the farm all I've undone. But what did you do down there? Tell me. You went in the grain business with that friend of yours?

ANDREW. Yes. After two years I had a share in it. I sold

out last year. (*He is answering* ROBERT'S *questions with great reluctance*).

ROBERT. And then?

ANDREW. I went in on my own.

ROBERT. Still in grain?

ANDREW. Yes.

ROBERT. What's the matter? You look as if I were accusing you of something.

ANDREW. I'm proud enough of the first four years. It's after that I'm not boasting of. I took to speculating.

ROBERT. In wheat?

ANDREW. Yes.

ROBERT. And you made money—gambling?

ANDREW. Yes.

ROBERT. (*thoughtfully*) I've been wondering what the great change was in you. (*After a pause*) You—a farmer—to gamble in a wheat pit with scraps of paper. There's a spiritual significance in that picture, Andy. (*He smiles bitterly*) I'm a failure, and Ruth's another—but we can both justly lay some of the blame for our stumbling on God. But you're the deepest-dyed failure of the three, Andy. You've spent eight years running away from yourself. Do you see what I mean? You used to be a creator when you loved the farm. You and life were in harmonious partnership. And now—— (*He stops as if seeking vainly for words*) My brain is muddled. But part of what I mean is that your gambling with the thing you used to love to create proves how far astray—— So you'll be punished. You'll have to suffer to win back—— (*His voice grows weaker and he sighs wearily*) It's no use. I can't say it. (*He lies back and closes his eyes, breathing pantingly*).

ANDREW. (*slowly*) I think I know what you're driving at, Rob—and it's true, I guess. (ROBERT *smiles gratefully and stretches out his hand, which* ANDREW *takes in his*).

ROBERT. I want you to promise me to do one thing, Andy, after——

ANDREW. I'll promise anything, as God is my Judge!

ROBERT. Remember, Andy, Ruth has suffered double her share. (*His voice faltering with weakness*) Only through contact with suffering, Andy, will you—awaken. Listen. You must marry Ruth—afterwards.

RUTH. (*with a cry*) Rob! (ROBERT *lies back, his eyes closed, gasping heavily for breath*).

ANDREW. (*making signs to her to humor him—gently*) You're tired out, Rob. You better lie down and rest a while, don't you think? We can talk later on.

ROBERT. (*with a mocking smile*) Later on! You always were an optimist, Andy! (*He sighs with exhaustion*) Yes, I'll go and rest a while. (*As* ANDREW *comes to help him*) It must be near sunrise, isn't it?

ANDREW. It's after six.

ROBERT. (*As* ANDREW *helps him into the bedroom*) Shut the door, Andy. I want to be alone. (ANDREW *reappears and shuts the door softly. He comes and sits down on his chair again, supporting his head on his hands. His face is drawn with the intensity of his dry-eyed anguish*).

RUTH. (*glancing at him—fearfully*) He's out of his mind now, isn't he?

ANDREW. He may be a little delirious. The fever would do that. (*With impotent rage*) God, what a shame! And

there's nothing we can do but sit and—wait! (*He springs from his chair and walks to the stove*).

RUTH. (*dully*) He was talking—wild—like he used to—only this time it sounded—unnatural, don't you think?

ANDREW. I don't know. The things he said to me had truth in them—even if he did talk them way up in the air, like he always sees things. Still—— (*He glances down at* RUTH *keenly*) Why do you suppose he wanted us to promise we'd—— (*Confusedly*) You know what he said.

RUTH. (*dully*) His mind was wandering, I s'pose.

ANDREW. (*with conviction*) No—there was something back of it.

RUTH. He wanted to make sure I'd be all right—after he'd gone, I expect.

ANDREW. No, it wasn't that. He knows very well I'd naturally look after you without—anything like that.

RUTH. He might be thinking of—something happened five years back, the time you came home from the trip.

ANDREW. What happened? What do you mean?

RUTH. (*dully*) We had a fight.

ANDREW. A fight? What has that to do with me?

RUTH. It was about you—in a way.

ANDREW. (*amazed*) About *me?*

RUTH. Yes, mostly. You see I'd found out I'd made a mistake about Rob soon after we were married—when it was too late.

ANDREW. Mistake? (*Slowly*) You mean—you found out you didn't love Rob?

RUTH. Yes.

ANDREW. Good God!

RUTH. And then I thought that when Mary came it'd be different, and I'd love him; but it didn't happen that way. And I couldn't bear with his blundering and book-reading—and I grew to hate him, almost.

ANDREW. Ruth!

RUTH. I couldn't help it. No woman could. It had to be because I loved someone else, I'd found out. (*She sighs wearily*) It can't do no harm to tell you now—when it's all past and gone—and dead. *You* were the one I really loved—only I didn't come to the knowledge of it 'til too late.

ANDREW. (*stunned*) Ruth! Do you know what you're saying?

RUTH. It was true—then. (*With sudden fierceness*) How could I help it? No woman could.

ANDREW. Then—you loved me—that time I came home?

RUTH. (*doggedly*) I'd known your real reason for leaving home the first time—everybody knew it—and for three years I'd been thinking——

ANDREW. That I loved you?

RUTH. Yes. Then that day on the hill you laughed about what a fool you'd been for loving me once—and I knew it was all over.

ANDREW. Good God, but I never thought—— (*He stops, shuddering at his remembrance*) And did Rob——

RUTH. That was what I'd started to tell. We'd had a fight just before you came and I got crazy mad—and I told him all I've told you.

ANDREW. (*gaping at her speechlessly for a moment*) You told Rob—you loved me?

RUTH. Yes.

ANDREW. (*shrinking away from her in horror*) You—you —you mad fool, you! How could you do such a thing?

RUTH. I couldn't help it. I'd got to the end of bearing things—without talking.

ANDREW. Then Rob must have known every moment I stayed here! And yet he never said or showed—God, how he must have suffered! Didn't you know how much he loved you?

RUTH. (*dully*) Yes. I knew he liked me.

ANDREW. Liked you! What kind of a woman are you? Couldn't you have kept silent? Did you have to torture him? No wonder he's dying! And you've lived together for five years with this between you?

RUTH. We've lived in the same house.

ANDREW. Does he still think——

RUTH. I don't know. We've never spoke a word about it since that day. Maybe, from the way he went on, he s'poses I care for you yet.

ANDREW. But you don't. It's outrageous. It's stupid! You don't love me!

RUTH. (*slowly*) I wouldn't know how to feel love, even if I tried, any more.

ANDREW. (*brutally*) And I don't love you, that's sure! (*He sinks into his chair, his head between his hands*) It's damnable such a thing should be between Rob and me. Why, I love Rob better'n anybody in the world and always did. There isn't a thing on God's green earth I wouldn't have done to keep trouble away from him. And I have to be the very one—it's damnable! How am I going to face him again? What can I say to him now? (*He groans with anguished*

rage. After a pause) He asked me to promise—what am I going to do?

RUTH. You can promise—so's it'll ease his mind—and not mean anything.

ANDREW. What? Lie to him now—when he's dying? (*Determinedly*) No! It's *you* who'll have to do the lying, since it must be done. You've got a chance now to undo some of all the suffering you've brought on Rob. Go in to him! Tell him you never loved me—it was all a mistake. Tell him you only said so because you were mad and didn't know what you were saying! Tell him something, anything, that'll bring him peace!

RUTH. (*dully*) He wouldn't believe me.

ANDREW. (*furiously*) You've got to make him believe you, do you hear? You've got to—now—hurry—you never know when it may be too late. (*As she hesitates—imploringly*) For God's sake, Ruth! Don't you see you owe it to him? You'll never forgive yourself if you don't.

RUTH. (*dully*) I'll go. (*She gets wearily to her feet and walks slowly toward the bedroom*) But it won't do any good. (ANDREW'S *eyes are fixed on her anxiously. She opens the door and steps inside the room. She remains standing there for a minute. Then she calls in a frightened voice*) Rob! Where are you? (*Then she hurries back, trembling with fright*) Andy! Andy! He's gone!

ANDREW. (*misunderstanding her—his face pale with dread*) He's not——

RUTH. (*interrupting him—hysterically*) He's gone! The bed's empty. The window's wide open. He must have crawled out into the yard!

ANDREW. (*springing to his feet. He rushes into the bedroom and returns immediately with an expression of alarmed amazement on his face*) Come! He can't have gone far! (*Grabbing his hat he takes* RUTH'S *arm and shoves her toward the door*) Come on! (*Opening the door*) Let's hope to God—— (*The door closes behind them, cutting off his words as*

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT THREE

Scene Two

Same as Act One, Scene One—A section of country highway. The sky to the east is already alight with bright color and a thin, quivering line of flame is spreading slowly along the horizon rim of the dark hills. The roadside, however, is still steeped in the grayness of the dawn, shadowy and vague. The field in the foreground has a wild uncultivated appearance as if it had been allowed to remain fallow the preceding summer. Parts of the snake-fence in the rear have been broken down. The apple tree is leafless and seems dead. ROBERT *staggers weakly in from the left. He stumbles into the ditch and lies there for a moment; then crawls with a great effort to the top of the bank where he can see the sun rise, and collapses weakly.* RUTH *and* ANDREW *come hurriedly along the road from the left.*

ANDREW. (*stopping and looking about him*) There he is! I knew it! I knew we'd find him here.

ROBERT. (*trying to raise himself to a sitting position as they hasten to his side—with a wan smile*) I thought I'd given you the slip.

ANDREW. (*with kindly bullying*) Well you didn't, you old scoundrel, and we're going to take you right back where you belong—in bed. (*He makes a motion to lift* ROBERT).

ROBERT. Don't, Andy. Don't, I tell you!

ANDREW. You're in pain?

ROBERT. (*simply*) No. I'm dying. (*He falls back weakly.* RUTH *sinks down beside him with a sob and pillows his head on her lap.* ANDREW *stands looking down at him helplessly.* ROBERT *moves his head restlessly on* RUTH's *lap*) I couldn't stand it back there in the room. It seemed as if all my life—I'd been cooped in a room. So I thought I'd try to end as I might have—if I'd had the courage—alone—in a ditch by the open road—watching the sun rise.

ANDREW. Rob! Don't talk. You're wasting your strength. Rest a while and then we'll carry you——

ROBERT. Still hoping, Andy? Don't. I know. (*There is a pause during which he breathes heavily, straining his eyes toward the horizon*) The sun comes so slowly. (*With an ironical smile*) The doctor told me to go to the far-off places—and I'd be cured. He was right. That was always the cure for me. It's too late—for this life—but—— (*He has a fit of coughing which racks his body*).

ANDREW. (*with a hoarse sob*) Rob! (*He clenches his fists in an impotent rage against Fate*) God! God! (RUTH *sobs brokenly and wipes* ROBERT's *lips with her handkerchief*).

ROBERT. (*in a voice which is suddenly ringing with the happiness of hope*) You mustn't feel sorry for me. Don't you see I'm happy at last—free—free!—freed from the farm—free to wander on and on—eternally! (*He raises himself on his elbow, his face radiant, and points to the horizon*) Look! Isn't it beautiful beyond the hills? I can hear the old voices calling me to come—— (*Exultantly*) And this time I'm going! It isn't the end. It's a free beginning—the start of my

voyage! I've won to my trip—the right of release—beyond the horizon! Oh, you ought to be glad—glad—for my sake! (*He collapses weakly*) Andy! (ANDREW *bends down to him*) Remember Ruth——

ANDREW. I'll take care of her, I swear to you, Rob!

ROBERT. Ruth has suffered—remember, Andy—only through sacrifice—the secret beyond there—— (*He suddenly raises himself with his last remaining strength and points to the horizon where the edge of the sun's disc is rising from the rim of the hills*) The sun! (*He remains with his eyes fixed on it for a moment. A rattling noise throbs from his throat. He mumbles*) Remember! (*And falls back and is still.* RUTH *gives a cry of horror and springs to her feet, shuddering, her hands over her eyes.* ANDREW *bends on one knee beside the body, placing a hand over* ROBERT'S *heart, then he kisses his brother reverentially on the forehead and stands up*).

ANDREW. (*facing* RUTH, *the body between them—in a dead voice*) He's dead. (*With a sudden burst of fury*) God damn you, you never told him!

RUTH. (*piteously*) He was so happy without my lying to him.

ANDREW. (*pointing to the body—trembling with the violence of his rage*) This is your doing, you damn woman, you coward, you murderess!

RUTH. (*sobbing*) Don't, Andy! I couldn't help it—and he knew how I'd suffered, too. He told you—to remember.

ANDREW. (*stares at her for a moment, his rage ebbing away, an expression of deep pity gradually coming over his face. Then he glances down at his brother and speaks brokenly in a compassionate voice*) Forgive me, Ruth—for his sake—and

I'll remember—— (RUTH *lets her hands fall from her face and looks at him uncomprehendingly. He lifts his eyes to hers and forces out falteringly*) I—you—we've both made a mess of things! We must try to help each other—and—in time—we'll come to know what's right—— (*Desperately*) And perhaps we—— (*But* RUTH, *if she is aware of his words, gives no sign. She remains silent, gazing at him dully with the sad humility of exhaustion, her mind already sinking back into that spent calm beyond the further troubling of any hope*).

(*The Curtain Falls*)

THE STRAW

A Play in Three Acts

(1919)

CHARACTERS

BILL CARMODY

MARY, NORA, TOM, BILLY — *his children*

DOCTOR GAYNOR

FRED NICHOLLS

EILEEN CARMODY, *Bill's eldest child*

STEPHEN MURRAY

MISS HOWARD, *a nurse in training*

MISS GILPIN, *superintendent of the Infirmary*

DOCTOR STANTON, *of the Hill Farm Sanatorium*

DOCTOR SIMMS, *his assistant*

MR. SLOAN

PETERS, *a patient*

MRS. TURNER, *matron of the Sanatorium*

MISS BAILEY, MRS. ABNER, FLYNN — *Patients*

OTHER PATIENTS OF THE SANATORIUM

MRS. BRENNAN.

SCENES

ACT I

SCENE I: The Kitchen of the Carmody Home—Evening.
SCENE II: The Reception Room of the Infirmary, Hill Farm Sanatorium—An Evening a Week Later.

ACT II

SCENE I: Assembly Room of the Main Building at the Sanatorium—A Morning Four Months Later.
SCENE II: A Crossroads Near the Sanatorium—Midnight of the Same Day.

ACT III

An Isolation Room and Porch at the Sanatorium—An Afternoon **Four Months Later.**

THE STRAW

ACT ONE

THE STRAW

ACT ONE

Scene One

The kitchen of the Carmody home on the outskirts of a manufacturing town in Connecticut. On the left, forward, the sink. Farther back, two windows looking out on the yard. In the left corner, rear, the icebox. Immediately to the right of it, in the rear wall, a window opening on the side porch. To the right of this, a dish closet, and a door leading into the hall where the main front entrance to the house and the stairs to the floor above are situated. On the right, to the rear, a door opening on the dining room. Farther forward, the kitchen range with scuttle, wood box, etc. In the center of the room, a table with a red and white cover. Four cane-bottomed chairs are pushed under the table. In front of the stove, two battered, wicker rocking chairs. The floor is partly covered by linoleum strips. The walls are papered a light cheerful color. Several old framed picture-supplement prints hang from nails. Everything has a clean, neatly-kept appearance. The supper dishes are piled in the sink ready for washing. A dish pan of water simmers on the stove.

It is about eight o'clock in the evening of a bitter cold day in late February.

As the curtain rises, BILL CARMODY *is discovered sitting in a rocker by the stove, reading a newspaper and smoking a black-*

ened clay pipe. He is a man of fifty, heavy-set and round-shouldered, with long muscular arms and swollen-veined, hairy hands. His face is bony and ponderous; his nose, short and squat; his mouth large, thick-lipped and harsh; his complexion mottled—red, purple-streaked, and freckled; his hair, short and stubby with a bald spot on the crown. The expression of his small, blue eyes is one of selfish cunning. His voice is loud and hoarse. He wears a flannel shirt, open at the neck, criss-crossed by red suspenders; black, baggy trousers gray with dust; muddy brogans.

His youngest daughter, MARY, *is sitting on a chair by the table, front, turning over the pages of a picture book. She is a delicate, dark-haired, blue-eyed, quiet little girl about eight years old.*

CARMODY. (*after watching the child's preoccupation for a moment, in a tone of half-exasperated amusement*) Well, but you're the quiet one, surely! It's the dead spit and image of your sister, Eileen, you are, with your nose always in a book; and you're like your mother, too, God rest her soul. (*He crosses himself with pious unction and* MARY *also does so*) It's Nora and Tom has the high spirits in them like their father; and Billy, too,—if he is a lazy shiftless divil—has the fightin' Carmody blood like me. You're a Cullen like your mother's people. They always was dreamin' their lives out. (*He lights his pipe and shakes his head with ponderous gravity*) It's out rompin' and playin' you ought to be at your age, not carin' a fig for books. (*With a glance at the clock*) Is that auld fool of a doctor stayin' the night? Run out in the hall, Mary, and see if you hear him.

MARY. (*goes out into the hall, rear, and comes back*) He's upstairs. I heard him talking to Eileen.

CARMODY. Close the door, ye little divil! There's a freezin' draught comin' in. (*She does so and comes back to her chair.* CARMODY *continues with a sneer*) I've no use for their drugs at all. They only keep you sick to pay more visits. I'd not have sent for this bucko if Eileen didn't scare me by faintin'.

MARY. (*anxiously*) Is Eileen very sick, Papa?

CARMODY. (*spitting—roughly*) If she is, it's her own fault entirely—weakenin' her health by readin' here in the house. (*Irritably*) Put down that book on the table and leave it be. I'll have no more readin' or I'll take the strap to you!

MARY. (*laying the book on the table*) It's only pictures.

CARMODY. No back talk! Pictures or not, it's all the same mopin' and lazin' in it. (*After a pause—morosely*) Who's to do the work and look after Nora and Tom and yourself, if Eileen is bad took and has to stay in her bed? All that I've saved from slavin' and sweatin' in the sun with a gang of lazy Dagoes'll be up the spout in no time. (*Bitterly*) What a fool a man is to be raisin' a raft of children and him not a millionaire! (*With lugubrious self-pity*) Mary, dear, it's a black curse God put on me when he took your mother just when I needed her most. (MARY *commences to sob.* CARMODY *starts and looks at her angrily*) What are you snifflin' at?

MARY. (*tearfully*) I was thinking—of Mama.

CARMODY. (*scornfully*) It's late you are with your tears, and her cold in her grave for a year. Stop it, I'm tellin' you! (MARY *gulps back her sobs*).

(*There is a noise of childish laughter and screams from the street in front. The outside door is opened and slammed, foot-*

steps pound along the hall. The door in the rear is shoved open, and NORA *and* TOM *rush in breathlessly.* NORA *is a bright, vivacious, red-haired girl of eleven—pretty after an elfish, mischievous fashion—light-hearted and robust).*

(TOM *resembles* NORA *in disposition and appearance. A healthy, good-humored youngster with a shock of sandy hair. He is a year younger than* NORA. *They are followed into the room, a moment later, by their brother,* BILLY, *who is evidently loftily disgusted with their antics.* BILLY *is a fourteen-year-old replica of his father, whom he imitates even to the hoarse, domineering tone of voice).*

CARMODY. (*grumpily*) Ah, here you are, the lot of you. Shut that door after you! What's the use in me spendin' money for coal if all you do is to let the cold night in the room itself?

NORA. (*hopping over to him—teasingly*) Me and Tom had a race, Papa. I beat him. (*She sticks her tongue out at her younger brother*) Slow poke!

TOM. You didn't beat me, neither!

NORA. I did, too!

TOM. You tripped me comin' up the steps. Brick-top! Cheater!

NORA. (*flaring up*) You're a liar! I beat you fair. Didn't I, Papa?

CARMODY. (*with a grin*) You did, darlin'. (TOM *slinks back to the chair in the rear of the table, sulking.* CARMODY *pats* NORA'S *red hair with delighted pride*) Sure it's you can beat the divil himself!

NORA. (*sticks out her tongue again at* TOM) See? Liar! (*She goes and perches on the table near* MARY *who is staring sadly in front of her).*

CARMODY. (*to* BILLY—*irritably*) Did you get the plug I told you?

BILLY. Sure. (*He takes a plug of tobacco from his pocket and hands it to his father.* NORA *slides down off her perch and disappears, unnoticed, under the table*).

CARMODY. It's a great wonder you didn't forget it—and me without a chew. (*He bites off a piece and tucks it into his cheek*).

TOM. (*suddenly clutching at his leg with a yell*) Ouch! Darn you! (*He kicks frantically at something under the table, but* NORA *scrambles out at the other end, grinning*).

CARMODY. (*angrily*) Shut your big mouth!

TOM. (*indignantly*) She pinched me—hard as she could, too—and look at her laughin'!

NORA. (*hopping on the table again*) Cry-baby!

TOM. I'll tell Eileen, wait 'n' see!

NORA. Tattle-tale! Eileen's sick.

TOM. That's why you dast do it. You dasn't if she was up.

CARMODY. (*exasperated*) Go up to bed, the two of you, and no more talk, and you go with them, Mary.

NORA. (*giving a quick tug at* MARY's *hair*) Come on, Mary.

MARY. Ow! (*She begins to cry*).

CARMODY. (*raising his voice furiously*) Hush your noise! It's nothin' but blubberin' you do be doin' all the time. (*He stands up threateningly*) I'll have a moment's peace, I will! Go on, now! (*They scurry out of the rear door*).

NORA. (*sticks her head back in the door*) Can I say good-night to Eileen, papa?

CARMODY. No. The doctor's with her yet. (*Then he adds hastily*) Yes, go in to her, Nora. It'll drive himself out of the

house maybe, bad cess to him, and him stayin' half the night. (NORA *waits to hear no more but darts back, shutting the door behind her.* BILLY *takes the chair in front of the table.* CARMODY *sits down again with a groan*) The rheumatics are in my leg again. (*Shakes his head*) If Eileen's in bed long those brats'll have the house down. Ara, well, it's God's will, I suppose, but where the money'll come from, I dunno. (*With a disparaging glance at his son*) They'll not be raisin' your wages soon, I'll be bound.

BILLY. (*surlily*) Naw.

CARMODY. (*still scanning him with contempt*) A divil of a lot of good it was for me to go against Eileen's wish and let you leave off your schoolin' this year thinkin' the money you'd earn would help with the house.

BILLY. Aw, goin' to school didn't do me no good. The teachers was all down on me. I couldn't learn nothin' there.

CARMODY. (*disgustedly*) Nor any other place, I'm thinkin', you're that thick. (*There is a noise from the stairs in the hall*) Wisht! It's the doctor comin' down from Eileen. (*The door in the rear is opened and Doctor Gaynor enters. He is a stout, bald, middle-aged man, forceful of speech, who in the case of patients of the* CARMODYS' *class dictates rather than advises.* CARMODY *adopts a whining tone*) Aw, Doctor, and how's Eileen now?

GAYNOR. (*does not answer this but comes forward into the room holding out two slips of paper—dictatorially*) Here are two prescriptions that'll have to be filled immediately.

CARMODY. (*frowning*) You take them, Billy, and run round to the drug store. (GAYNOR *hands them to* BILLY).

BILLY. Give me the money, then.

CARMODY. (*reaches down into his pants pocket with a sigh*) How much will they come to, Doctor?

GAYNOR. About a dollar, I guess.

CARMODY. (*protestingly*) A dollar! Sure it's expensive medicines you're givin' her for a bit of a cold. (*He meets the doctor's cold glance of contempt and he wilts—grumblingly, as he peels a dollar bill off a small roll and gives it to* BILLY) Bring back the change—if there is any. And none of your tricks!

BILLY. Aw, what do you think I am? (*He takes the money and goes out*).

CARMODY. (*grudgingly*) Take a chair, Doctor, and tell me what's wrong with Eileen.

GAYNOR. (*seating himself by the table—gravely*) Your daughter is very seriously ill.

CARMODY. (*irritably*) Aw, Doctor, didn't I know you'd be sayin' that, anyway!

GAYNOR. (*ignoring this remark—coldly*) She has tuberculosis of the lungs.

CARMODY. (*with puzzled awe*) Too-ber-c'losis?

GAYNOR. Consumption, if that makes it plainer to you.

CARMODY. (*with dazed terror—after a pause*) Consumption? Eileen? (*With sudden anger*) What lie is it you're tellin' me?

GAYNOR. (*icily*) Look here, Carmody!

CARMODY. (*bewilderedly*) Don't be angry, now. Sure I'm out of my wits entirely. Ah, Doctor, sure you must be mistaken!

GAYNOR. There's no chance for a mistake, I'm sorry to say. Her right lung is badly affected.

CARMODY. (*desperately*) It's a cold only, maybe.

GAYNOR. (*curtly*) Don't talk nonsense. (CARMODY *groans.* GAYNOR *continues authoritatively*) She'll have to go to a sanatorium at once. She ought to have been sent to one months ago. (*Casts a look of indignant scorn at* CARMODY *who is sitting staring at the floor with an expression of angry stupor on his face*) It's a wonder to me you didn't see the condition she was in and force her to take care of herself.

CARMODY. (*with vague fury*) God blast it!

GAYNOR. She kept on doing her work, I suppose—taking care of her brothers and sisters, washing, cooking, sweeping, looking after your comfort—worn out—when she should have been in bed—and— (*He gets to his feet with a harsh laugh*) But what's the use of talking? The damage is done. We've got to set to work to repair it at once. I'll write tonight to Dr. Stanton of the Hill Farm Sanatorium and find out if he has a vacancy.

CARMODY. (*his face growing red with rage*) Is it sendin' Eileen away to a hospital you'd be? (*Exploding*) Then you'll not! You'll get that notion out of your head damn quick. It's all nonsense you're stuffin' me with, and lies, makin' things out to be the worst in the world. She'll not move a step out of here, and I say so, and I'm her father!

GAYNOR. (*who has been staring at him with contempt—coldly angry*) You refuse to let her go to a sanatorium?

CARMODY. I do.

GAYNOR. (*threateningly*) Then I'll have to report her case to the Society for the Prevention of Tuberculosis of this county and tell them of your refusal to help her.

CARMODY. (*wavering a bit*) Report all you like, and be damned to you!

GAYNOR. (*ignoring the interruption—impressively*) A majority of the most influential men of this city are back of the Society. (*Grimly*) We'll find a way to move you, Carmody, if you try to be stubborn.

CARMODY. (*thoroughly frightened but still protesting*) Ara, Doctor, you don't see the way of it at all. If Eileen goes to the hospital, who's to be takin' care of the others, and mindin' the house when I'm off to work?

GAYNOR. You can easily hire some woman.

CARMODY. (*at once furious again*) Hire? D'you think I'm a millionaire itself?

GAYNOR. (*contemptuously*) That's where the shoe pinches, eh? (*In a rage*) I'm not going to waste any more words on you, Carmody, but I'm damn well going to see this thing through! You might as well give in first as last.

CARMODY. (*wailing*) But where's the money comin' from?

GAYNOR. The weekly fee at the Hill Farm is only seven dollars. You can easily afford that—the price of a few rounds of drinks.

CARMODY. Seven dollars! And I'll have to pay a woman to come in—and the four of the children eatin' their heads off! Glory be to God, I'll not have a penny saved for me old age—and then it's the poor house!

GAYNOR. Well, perhaps I can get the Society to pay half for your daughter—if you're really as hard up as you pretend.

CARMODY. (*brightening*) Ah, Doctor, thank you.

GAYNOR. (*abruptly*) Then it's all settled?

CARMODY. (*grudgingly—trying to make the best of it*) I'll do my best for Eileen, if it's needful—and you'll not be tellin' them people about it at all, Doctor?

GAYNOR. Not unless you force me to.

CARMODY. And they'll pay the half, surely?

GAYNOR. I'll see what I can do.

CARMODY. God bless you, Doctor! (*Grumblingly*) It's the whole of it they ought to be payin', I'm thinkin', and them with sloos of money. 'Tis them builds the hospitals and why should they be wantin' the poor like me to support them?

GAYNOR. (*disgustedly*) Bah! (*Abruptly*) I'll telephone to Doctor Stanton tomorrow morning. Then I'll know something definite when I come to see your daughter in the afternoon.

CARMODY. (*darkly*) You'll be comin' again tomorrow? (*Half to himself*) Leave it to the likes of you to be drainin' a man dry. (GAYNOR *has gone out to the hall in rear and does not hear this last remark. There is a loud knock from the outside door. The Doctor comes back into the room carrying his hat and overcoat*).

GAYNOR. There's someone knocking.

CARMODY. Who'll it be? Ah, it's Fred Nicholls, maybe. (*In a low voice to* GAYNOR *who has started to put on his overcoat*) Eileen's young man, Doctor, that she's engaged to marry, as you might say.

GAYNOR. (*thoughtfully*) Hmm—yes—she spoke of him. (*As another knock sounds* CARMODY *hurries to the rear.* GAYNOR, *after a moment's indecision, takes off his overcoat again and sits down. A moment later* CARMODY *reënters followed by* FRED NICHOLLS, *who has left his overcoat and hat in the hallway.* NICHOLLS *is a young fellow of twenty-three, stockily built, fair-haired, handsome in a commonplace, conventional mold. His manner is obviously an attempt at suave gentility; he has an easy, taking smile and a ready laugh, but there is a*

petty, calculating expression in his small, observing, blue eyes. His well-fitting, readymade clothes are carefully pressed. His whole get-up suggests an attitude of man-about-small-town complacency).

CARMODY. (*as they enter*) I had a mind to phone to your house but I wasn't wishful to disturb you, knowin' you'd be comin' to call tonight.

NICHOLLS. (*with disappointed concern*) It's nothing serious, I hope.

CARMODY. (*grumblingly*) Ah, who knows? Here's the doctor. You've not met him?

NICHOLLS. (*politely, looking at* GAYNOR *who inclines his head stiffly*) I haven't had the pleasure. Of course I've heard——

CARMODY. It's Doctor Gaynor. This is Fred Nicholls, Doctor. (*The two men shake hands with conventional pleased-to-meet yous*) Sit down, Fred, that's a good lad, and be talkin' to the Doctor a moment while I go upstairs and see how is Eileen.

NICHOLLS. Certainly, Mr. Carmody—and tell her how sorry I am to learn she's under the weather.

CARMODY. I will so. (*He goes out*).

GAYNOR. (*after a pause in which he is studying* NICHOLLS) Do you happen to be any relative to Albert Nicholls over at the Downs Manufacturing Company?

NICHOLLS. (*smiling*) He's sort of a near relative—my father.

GAYNOR. Ah, yes?

NICHOLLS. (*with satisfaction*) I work for the Downs Company myself—bookkeeper.

GAYNOR. Miss Carmody had a position there also, didn't she, before her mother died?

NICHOLLS. Yes. She had a job as stenographer for a time. When she graduated from the business college—I was already working at the Downs—and through my father's influence—you understand. (GAYNOR *nods curtly*) She was getting on finely, too, and liked the work. It's too bad—her mother's death, I mean—forcing her to give it up and come home to take care of those kids.

GAYNOR. It's a damn shame. That's the main cause of her breakdown.

NICHOLLS. (*frowning*) I've noticed she's been looking badly lately. Well, it's all her father's fault—and her own, too, because whenever I raised a kick about his making a slave of her, she always defended him. (*With a quick glance at the Doctor—in a confidential tone*) Between us, Carmody's as selfish as they make 'em, if you want my opinion.

GAYNOR. (*with a growl*) He's a hog on two legs.

NICHOLLS. (*with a gratified smile*) You bet! (*With a patronizing air*) I hope to get Eileen away from all this as soon as—things pick up a little. (*Making haste to explain his connection with the dubious household*) Eileen and I have gone around together for years—went to Grammar and High School together—in different classes, of course. She's really a corker—very different from the rest of the family you've seen—like her mother. My folks like her awfully well. Of course, they'd never stand for him.

GAYNOR. You'll excuse my curiosity, but you and Miss Carmody are engaged, aren't you? Carmody said you were.

NICHOLLS. (*embarrassed*) Why, yes, in a way—but nothing definite—no official announcement or anything of that kind.

(*With a sentimental smile*) It's always been sort of understood between us. (*He laughs awkwardly*).

GAYNOR. (*gravely*) Then I can be frank with you. I'd like to be because I may need your help. Besides, you're bound to know anyway. She'd tell you.

NICHOLLS. (*a look of apprehension coming over his face*) Is it—about her sickness?

GAYNOR. Yes.

NICHOLLS. Then—it's serious?

GAYNOR. It's pulmonary tuberculosis—consumption.

NICHOLLS. (*stunned*) Consumption? Good heavens! (*After a dazed pause—lamely*) Are you sure, Doctor?

GAYNOR. Positive. (NICHOLLS *stares at him with vaguely frightened eyes*) It's had a good start—thanks to her father's blind selfishness—but let's hope that can be overcome. The important thing is to ship her off to a sanatorium immediately. That's where you can be of help. It's up to you to help me convince Carmody that it's imperative she be sent away at once—for the safety of those around her as well as her own.

NICHOLLS. (*confusedly*) I'll do my best, Doctor. (*As if he couldn't yet believe his ears—shuddering*) Good heavens! She never said a word about—being so ill. She's had a cold. But Doctor,—do you think this sanatorium will——?

GAYNOR. (*with hearty hopefulness*) She has every chance. The Hill Farm has a really surprising record of arrested cases. Of course, she'll never be able to live as carelessly as before, even after the most favorable results. (*Apologetically*) I'm telling you all this as being the one most intimately concerned. You're the one who'll have to assume responsibility when she returns to everyday life.

NICHOLLS. (*answering as if he were merely talking to screen the thoughts in his mind*) Yes—certainly—. Where is this sanatorium, Doctor?

GAYNOR. Half an hour by train to the town. The sanatorium is two miles out on the hills. You'll be able to see her whenever you've a day off.

NICHOLLS. (*a look of horrified realization has been creeping into his eyes*) You said—Eileen ought to be sent away—for the sake of those around her——?

GAYNOR. T. B. is extremely contagious, you must know that. Yet I'll bet she's been fondling and kissing those brothers and sisters of hers regardless. (NICHOLLS *fidgets uneasily on his chair*).

NICHOLLS. (*his eyes shiftily avoiding the doctor's face*) Then the kids might have gotten it—by kissing Eileen?

GAYNOR. It stands to reason that's a common means of communication.

NICHOLLS. (*very much shaken*) Yes. I suppose it must be. But that's terrible, isn't it? (*With sudden volubility, evidently extremely anxious to wind up this conversation and conceal his thoughts from* GAYNOR) I'll promise you, Doctor, I'll tell Carmody straight what's what. He'll pay attention to me or I'll know the reason why.

GAYNOR. (*getting to his feet and picking up his overcoat*) Good boy! Tell him I'll be back tomorrow with definite information about the sanatorium.

NICHOLLS. (*helping him on with his overcoat, anxious to have him go*) All right, Doctor.

GAYNOR. (*puts on his hat*) And do your best to cheer the

patient up. Give her confidence in her ability to get well. That's half the battle.

NICHOLLS. (*hastily*) I'll do all I can.

GAYNOR. (*turns to the door and shakes* NICHOLLS' *hand sympathetically*) And don't take it to heart too much yourself. In six months she'll come back to you her old self again.

NICHOLLS. (*nervously*) It's hard on a fellow—so suddenly but I'll remember—and—(*abruptly*) Good-night, Doctor.

GAYNOR. Good-night. (*He goes out. The outer door is heard shutting behind him.* NICHOLLS *closes the door, rear, and comes back and sits in the chair in front of table. He rests his chin on his hands and stares before him, a look of desperate, frightened calculation coming into his eyes.* CARMODY *is heard clumping heavily down the stairs. A moment later he enters. His expression is glum and irritated*).

CARMODY. (*coming forward to his chair by the stove*) Has he gone away?

NICHOLLS. (*turning on him with a look of repulsion*) Yes. He said to tell you he'd be back tomorrow with definite information—about the sanatorium business.

CARMODY. (*darkly*) Oho, he did, did he? Maybe I'll surprise him. I'm thinkin' it's lyin' he is about Eileen's sickness, and her lookin' as fresh as a daisy with the high color in her cheeks when I saw her now.

NICHOLLS. (*impatiently*) Gaynor knows his business. (*After a moment's hesitation*) He told me all about Eileen's sickness.

CARMODY. (*resentfully*) Small thanks to him to be tellin' our secrets to the town.

NICHOLLS. (*exasperated*) He only told me because you'd

said I and Eileen were engaged. You're the one who was telling —secrets.

CARMODY. (*irritated*) Ara, don't be talkin'! That's no secret at all with the whole town watchin' Eileen and you spoonin' together from the time you was kids.

NICHOLLS. (*vindictively*) Well, the whole town is liable to find out—— (*He checks himself*).

CARMODY. (*too absorbed in his own troubles to notice this threat*) So he told you he'd send Eileen away to the hospital? I've half a mind not to let him—and let him try to make me! (*With a frown*) But Eileen herself says she's wantin' to go, now. (*Angrily*) It's all that divil's notion he put in her head that the children'd be catchin' her sickness that makes her willin' to go.

NICHOLLS. (*with a superior air*) From what he told me, I should say it's the only thing for Eileen to do if she wants to get well quickly. (*Spitefully*) And I'd certainly not go against Gaynor, if I was you.

CARMODY. (*worriedly*) But what can he do—him and his Sasiety? I'm her father.

NICHOLLS. (*seeing* CARMODY'S *uneasiness with revengeful satisfaction*) You'll make a mistake if you think he's bluffing. It'd probably get in all the papers about you refusing. Everyone would be down on you. (*As a last jab—spitefully*) You might even lose your job over it, people would be so sore.

CARMODY. (*jumping to his feet*) Ah, divil take him! Let him send her where he wants, then.

NICHOLLS. (*as an afterthought*) And, honestly, Mr. Carmody, I don't see how you can object for a second. (*Seeing*

CARMODY'S *shaken condition, he finishes boldly*) You've some feeling for your own daughter, haven't you?

CARMODY. (*apprehensively*) Whisht! She might hear you. Let her do what she's wishful.

NICHOLLS. (*complacently—feeling his duty in the matter well done*) That's the right spirit. And you and I'll do all we can to help her. (*He gets to his feet*) Well, I guess I'll have to go. Tell Eileen——

CARMODY. You're not goin'? Sure, Eileen is puttin' on her clothes to come down and have a look at you.

NICHOLLS. (*suddenly panic-stricken by the prospect of facing her*) No—no—I can't stay—I only came for a moment—I've got an appointment—honestly. Besides, it isn't right for her to be up. You should have told her. (*The door in the rear is opened and* EILEEN *enters. She is just over eighteen. Her wavy mass of dark hair is parted in the middle and combed low on her forehead, covering her ears, to a knot at the back of her head. The oval of her face is spoiled by a long, rather heavy, Irish jaw contrasting with the delicacy of her other features. Her eyes are large and blue, confident in their compelling candor and sweetness; her lips, full and red, half-open, over strong even teeth, droop at the corners into an expression of wistful sadness; her clear complexion is unnaturally striking in its contrasting colors, rose and white; her figure is slight and undeveloped. She wears a plain black dress with a bit of white at the neck and wrists. She stands looking appealingly at* NICHOLLS *who avoids her glance. Her eyes have a startled, stunned expression as if the doctor's verdict were still in her ears*).

EILEEN. (*faintly—forcing a smile*) Good-evening, Fred. (*Her eyes search his face anxiously*).

NICHOLLS. (*confusedly*) Hello, Eileen. I'm so sorry to——. (*Clumsily trying to cover up his confusion, he goes over and leads her to a chair*) You sit down. You've got to take care of yourself. You never ought to have gotten up tonight.

EILEEN. (*sits down*) I wanted to talk to you. (*She raises her face with a pitiful smile.* NICHOLLS *hurriedly moves back to his own chair*).

NICHOLLS. (*almost brusquely*) I could have talked to you from the hall. You're silly to take chances just now. (EILEEN's *eyes show her hurt at his tone*).

CARMODY. (*seeing his chance—hastily*) You'll be stayin' a while now, Fred? I'll take a walk down the road. I'm needin' a drink to clear my wits. (*He goes to the door in rear*).

EILEEN. (*reproachfully*) You won't be long, Father? And please don't—you know.

CARMODY. (*exasperated*) Sure who wouldn't get drunk with all the sorrows of the world piled on him? (*He stamps out. A moment later the outside door bangs behind him.* EILEEN *sighs.* NICHOLLS *walks up and down with his eyes on the floor*).

NICHOLLS. (*furious at* CARMODY *for having left him in this situation*) Honestly, Eileen, your father is the limit. I don't see how you stand for him. He's the most selfish——

EILEEN. (*gently*) Sssh! You mustn't, Fred. He just doesn't understand. (NICHOLLS *snorts disdainfully*) Don't! Let's not talk about him now. We won't have many more eve-

nings together for a long, long time. Did Father or the doctor tell you—— (*She falters*).

NICHOLLS. (*not looking at her—glumly*) Everything there was to tell, I guess.

EILEEN. (*hastening to comfort him*) You mustn't worry, Fred. Please don't! It'd make it so much worse for me if I thought you did. I'll be all right. I'll do exactly what they tell me, and in a few months I'll be back so fat and healthy you won't know me.

NICHOLLS. (*lamely*) Oh, there's no doubt of that. No one's worrying about your not getting well quick.

EILEEN. It won't be long. We can write often, and it isn't far away. You can come out and see me every Sunday—if you want to.

NICHOLLS. (*hastily*) Of course I will!

EILEEN. (*looking at his face searchingly*) Why do you act so funny? Why don't you sit down—here, by me? Don't you want to?

NICHOLLS. (*drawing up a chair by hers—flushing guiltily*) I—I'm all bawled up, Eileen. I don't know what I'm doing.

EILEEN. (*putting her hand on his knee*) Poor Fred! I'm so sorry I have to go. I didn't want to at first. I knew how hard it would be on Father and the kids—especially little Mary. (*Her voice trembles a bit*) And then the doctor said if I stayed I'd be putting them all in danger. He even ordered me not to kiss them any more. (*She bites her lips to restrain a sob—then coughs, a soft, husky cough.* NICHOLLS *shrinks away from her to the edge of his chair, his eyes shifting nervously with fright.* EILEEN *continues gently*) So I've got to go and get well, don't you see?

NICHOLLS. (*wetting his dry lips*) Yes—it's better.

EILEEN. (*sadly*) I'll miss the kids so much. Taking care of them has meant so much to me since Mother died. (*With a half-sob she suddenly throws her arms about his neck and hides her face on his shoulder. He shudders and fights against an impulse to push her away*) But I'll miss you most of all, Fred. (*She lifts her lips towards his, expecting a kiss. He seems about to kiss her—then averts his face with a shrinking movement, pretending he hasn't seen.* EILEEN'S *eyes grow wide with horror. She throws herself back into her own chair, staring accusingly at* NICHOLLS. *She speaks chokingly*) Fred! Why—why didn't you kiss—what is it? Are you—afraid? (*With a moaning sound*) Oooh!

NICHOLLS. (*goaded by this accusation into a display of manhood, seizes her fiercely by the arms*) No! What—what d'you mean? (*He tries to kiss her but she hides her face*).

EILEEN. (*in a muffled voice of hysterical self-accusation, pushing his head away*) No, no, you mustn't! The doctor told you not to, didn't he? Please don't, Fred! It would be awful if anything happened to you—through me. (NICHOLLS *gives up his attempts, recalled to caution by her words. She raises her face and tries to force a smile through her tears*) But you can kiss me on the forehead, Fred. That can't do any harm. (*His face crimson, he does so. She laughs hysterically*) It seems so silly—being kissed that way—by you. (*She gulps back a sob and continues to attempt to joke*) I'll have to get used to it, won't I?

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT ONE

Scene Two

The reception room of the Infirmary, a large, high-ceilinged room painted white, with oiled, hardwood floor. In the left wall, forward, a row of four windows. Farther back, the main entrance from the driveway, and another window. In the rear wall left, a glass partition looking out on the sleeping porch. A row of white beds, with the faces of patients barely peeping out from under piles of heavy bedclothes, can be seen. To the right of this partition, a bookcase, and a door leading to the hall past the patients' rooms. Farther right, another door opening on the examining room. In the right wall, rear, a door to the office. Farther forward, a row of windows. In front of the windows, a long dining table with chairs. On the left of the table, toward the center of the room, a chimney with two open fireplaces, facing left and right. Several wicker armchairs are placed around the fireplace on the left in which a cheerful wood fire is crackling. To the left of center, a round reading and writing table with a green-shaded electric lamp. Other electric lights are in brackets around the walls. Easy chairs stand near the table which is stacked with magazines. Rocking chairs are placed here and there about the room, near the windows, etc. A Victrola stands near the left wall, forward.

It is nearing eight o'clock of a cold evening about a week later.

At the rise of the curtain STEPHEN MURRAY *is discovered sit-*

ting in a chair in front of the fireplace, left. MURRAY *is thirty years old—a tall, slender, rather unusual looking fellow with a pale face, sunken under high cheek bones, lined about the eyes and mouth, jaded and worn for one still so young. His intelligent, large hazel eyes have a tired, dispirited expression in repose, but can quicken instantly with a concealment mechanism of mocking, careless humor whenever his inner privacy is threatened. His large mouth aids this process of protection by a quick change from its set apathy to a cheerful grin of cynical good nature. He gives off the impression of being somehow dissatisfied with himself but not yet embittered enough by it to take it out on others. His manner, as revealed by his speech—nervous, inquisitive, alert—seems more an acquired quality than any part of his real nature. He stoops a trifle, giving him a slightly round-shouldered appearance. He is dressed in a shabby dark suit, baggy at the knees. He is staring into the fire, dreaming, an open book lying unheeded on the arm of his chair. The Victrola is whining out the last strains of Dvorak's Humoresque. In the doorway to the office,* MISS GILPIN *stands talking to* MISS HOWARD. *The former is a slight, middle-aged woman with black hair, and a strong, intelligent face, its expression of resolute efficiency softened and made kindly by her warm, sympathetic gray eyes.* MISS HOWARD *is tall, slender and blond—decidedly pretty and provokingly conscious of it, yet with a certain air of seriousness underlying her apparent frivolity. She is twenty years old. The elder woman is dressed in the all white of a full-fledged nurse.* MISS HOWARD *wears the gray-blue uniform of one still in training. The record peters out.* MURRAY *sighs with relief but makes no move to get up and stop the*

grinding needle. MISS HOWARD *hurries across to the machine.* MISS GILPIN *goes back into the office.*

MISS HOWARD. (*takes off the record, glancing at* MURRAY *with amused vexation*) It's a wonder you wouldn't stop this machine grinding itself to bits, Mr. Murray.

MURRAY. (*with a smile*) I was hoping the darn thing would bust. (MISS HOWARD *sniffs.* MURRAY *grins at her teasingly*) It keeps you from talking to me. That's the real music.

MISS HOWARD. (*comes over to his chair laughing*) I think you're a natural born kidder. All newspaper reporters are like that, I've heard.

MURRAY. You wrong me terribly. (*Then frowning*) And it isn't charitable to remind me of my job.

MISS HOWARD. (*surprised*) I think it's great to be able to write. You ought to be proud of it.

MURRAY. (*glumly*) I'm not. You can't call it writing—not what I did—small town stuff. (*Changing the subject*) Do you know when I'm to be moved to the shacks?

MISS HOWARD. In a few days, I guess. MURRAY *grunts and moves nervously on his chair*) What's the matter? Don't you like us here at the Infirmary?

MURRAY. (*smiling*) Oh—you—yes! (*Then seriously*) I don't care for the atmosphere, though. (*He waves his hand toward the partition looking out on the porch*) All those people in bed out there on the porch seem so sick. It's depressing.

MISS HOWARD. All the patients have to come here first until Doctor Stanton finds out whether they're well enough to be sent out to the shacks and cottages. And remember you're a patient.

MURRAY. I know it. But I don't feel as if I were—really sick like them.

MISS HOWARD. (*wisely*) None of them do, either.

MURRAY. (*after a moment's reflection—cynically*) Yes, I suppose it's that pipe dream keeps us all going, eh?

MISS HOWARD. Well, you ought to be thankful. (*Lowering her voice*) Shall I tell you a secret? I've seen your chart and *you've* no cause to worry. Doctor Stanton joked about it. He said you were too uninteresting—there was so little the matter with you.

MURRAY. (*pleased but pretending indifference*) Humph! He's original in that opinion.

MISS HOWARD. I know it's hard you're being the only one up the week you've been here; but there's another patient due today. Maybe she'll be well enough to be around with you. (*With a quick glance at her wrist watch*) She can't be coming unless she got in on the last train.

MURRAY. (*interestedly*) It's a she, eh?

MISS HOWARD. Yes

MURRAY. (*grinning provokingly*) Young?

MISS HOWARD. Eighteen, I believe. (*Seeing his grin—with feigned pique*) I suppose you'll be asking if she's pretty next! Her name is Carmody, that's the only other thing I know. So there!

MISS GILPIN. (*appearing in the office doorway*) Miss Howard.

MISS HOWARD. Yes, Miss Gilpin. (*In an aside to* MURRAY *as she leaves him*) It's time for those horrid diets. (*She hurries back into the office.* MURRAY *stares into the fire.* MISS HOWARD *reappears from the office and goes out by the door to the hall, rear. Carriage wheels are heard from the driveway*

in front of the house on the left. They stop. After a pause there is a sharp rap on the door and a bell rings insistently. Men's muffled voices are heard in argument. MURRAY *turns curiously in his chair.* MISS GILPIN *comes from the office and walks quickly to the door, unlocking and opening it.* EILEEN *enters, followed by* NICHOLLS, *who is carrying her suit-case, and by her father*).

EILEEN. I'm Miss Carmody. I believe Doctor Gaynor wrote——

MISS GILPIN. (*taking her hand—with kind affability*) We've been expecting you all day. How do you do? I'm Miss Gilpin. You came on the last train, didn't you?

EILEEN. (*heartened by the other woman's kindness*) Yes. This is my father, Miss Gilpin—and Mr. Nicholls. (MISS GILPIN *shakes hands cordially with the two men who are staring about the room in embarrassment.* CARMODY *has very evidently been drinking. His voice is thick and his face puffed and stupid.* NICHOLLS' *manner is that of one who is accomplishing a necessary but disagreeable duty with the best grace possible, but is frightfully eager to get it over and done with.* CARMODY'S *condition embarrasses him acutely and when he glances at him it is with hatred and angry disgust*).

MISS GILPIN. (*indicating the chairs in front of the windows on the left, forward*) Won't you gentlemen sit down? (CARMODY *grunts sullenly and plumps himself into the one nearest the door.* NICHOLLS *hesitates, glancing down at the suit-case he carries.* MISS GILPIN *turns to* EILEEN) And now we'll get you settled immediately. Your room is all ready for you. If you'll follow me—— (*She turns toward the door in rear, center*).

EILEEN. Let me take the suit-case now, Fred.

MISS GILPIN. (*as he is about to hand it to her—decisively*) No, my dear, you mustn't. Put the case right down there, Mr. Nicholls. I'll have it taken to Miss Carmody's room in a moment. (*She shakes her finger at* EILEEN *with kindly admonition*) That's the first rule you'll have to learn. Never exert yourself or tax your strength. You'll find laziness is a virtue instead of a vice with us.

EILEEN. (*confused*) I—— I didn't know——

MISS GILPIN. (*smiling*) Of course you didn't. And now if you'll come with me I'll show you your room. We'll have a little chat there and I can explain all the other important rules in a second. The gentlemen can make themselves comfortable in the meantime. We won't be gone more than a moment.

NICHOLLS. (*feeling called upon to say something*) Yes—we'll wait—certainly, we're all right. (CARMODY *remains silent, glowering at the fire.* NICHOLLS *sits down beside him.* MISS GILPIN *and* EILEEN *go out.* MURRAY *switches his chair so he can observe the two men out of the corner of his eye while pretending to be absorbed in his book*).

CARMODY. (*looking about shiftily and reaching for the inside pocket of his overcoat*) I'll be havin' a nip now we're alone, and that cacklin' hen gone. (*He pulls out a pint flask, half full*).

NICHOLLS. (*excitedly*) Put that bottle away! (*In a whisper*) Don't you see that fellow in the chair there?

CARMODY. (*taking a big drink*) Ah, I'm not mindin' a man at all. Sure I'll bet it's himself would be likin' a taste of the same. (*He appears about to get up and invite* MURRAY *to join him but* NICHOLLS *grabs his arm*).

NICHOLLS. (*with a frightened look at* MURRAY *who appears buried in his book*) Stop it, you—— Don't you know he's probably a patient and they don't allow them——

CARMODY. (*scornfully*) It's queer they'd be allowin' the sick ones to read books when I'll bet it's the same lazy readin' in the house brought the half of them down with the consumption itself. (*Raising his voice*) I'm thinkin' this whole shebang is a big, thievin' fake—and I've always thought so.

NICHOLLS. (*furiously*) Put that bottle away, damn it! And don't shout. You're not in a barrel-house.

CARMODY. (*with provoking calm*) I'll put it back when I'm ready, not before, and no lip from you!

NICHOLLS. (*with fierce disgust*) You're drunk now.

CARMODY. (*raging*) Drunk, am I? Is it the like of a young jackass like you that's still wet behind the ears to be tellin' me I'm drunk?

NICHOLLS. (*half-rising from his chair—pleadingly*) For heaven's sake, Mr. Carmody, remember where we are and don't raise any rumpus. What'll Eileen say?

CARMODY. (*puts the bottle away hastily, mumbling to himself—then glowers about the room scornfully with blinking eyes*) It's a grand hotel this is, I'm thinkin,' for the rich to be takin' their ease, and not a hospital for the poor, but the poor has to pay for it.

NICHOLLS. (*fearful of another outbreak*) Sshh!

CARMODY. Don't be shshin' at me? I'd make Eileen come back out of this tonight if that divil of a doctor didn't have me by the throat.

NICHOLLS. (*glancing at him nervously*) I wonder how soon she'll be back? We'll have to hurry to make that last train.

CARMODY. (*angrily*) Is it anxious to get out of her sight you are, and you engaged to marry her? (NICHOLLS *flushes guiltily.* MURRAY *pricks up his ears and stares over at* NICHOLLS. *The latter meets his glance, scowls, and hurriedly averts his eyes.* CARMODY *goes on accusingly*) Sure, it's no heart at all you have—and her your sweetheart for years—and her sick with the consumption—and you wild to run away and leave her alone.

NICHOLLS. (*springing to his feet—furiously*) That's a——! (*He controls himself with an effort. His voice trembles*) You're not responsible for the idiotic things you're saying or I'd—— (*He turns away, seeking some escape from the old man's tongue*) I'll see if the man is still there with the rig. (*He goes to the door on left and goes out*).

CARMODY. (*following him with his eyes*) Go to hell, for all I'm preventin'. You've got no guts of a man in you. (*He addresses* MURRAY *with the good nature inspired by the flight of* NICHOLLS) Is it true you're one of the consumptives, young fellow?

MURRAY. (*delighted by this speech—with a grin*) Yes, I'm one of them.

CARMODY. My name's Carmody. What's yours, then?

MURRAY. Murray.

CARMODY. (*slapping his thigh*) Irish as Paddy's pig! (MURRAY *nods.* CARMODY *brightens and grows confidential*) I'm glad to be knowin' you're one of us. You can keep an eye on Eileen.

MURRAY. I'll be glad to do all I can.

CARMODY. Thanks to you—though it's a grand life she'll be havin' here from the fine look of the place. (*With whining*

self-pity) It's me it's hard on, God help me, with four small children and me widowed, and havin' to hire a woman to come in and look after them and the house now that Eileen's sick; and payin' for her curin' in this place, and me with only a bit of money in the bank for my old age. That's hard, now, on a man, and who'll say it isn't?

MURRAY. (*made uncomfortable by this confidence*) Hard luck always comes in bunches. (*To head off* CARMODY *who is about to give vent to more woe—quickly, with a glance toward the door from the hall*) If I'm not mistaken, here comes your daughter now.

CARMODY. (*as* EILEEN *comes into the room*) I'll make you acquainted. Eileen! (*She comes over to them, embarrassed to find her father in his condition so chummy with a stranger.* MURRAY *rises to his feet*) This is Mr. Murray, Eileen. He's Irish and he'll put you on to the ropes of the place. He's got the consumption, too, God pity him.

EILEEN. (*distressed*) Oh, Father, how can you—— (*With a look at* MURRAY *which pleads for her father*) I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Murray.

MURRAY. (*with a straight glance at her which is so frankly admiring that she flushes and drops her eyes*) I'm glad to meet you. (*The front door is opened and* NICHOLLS *re-appears, shivering with the cold. He stares over at the others with ill-concealed irritation*).

CARMODY. (*noticing him—with malicious satisfaction*) Oho, here you are again. (NICHOLLS *scowls and turns away.* CARMODY *addresses his daughter with a sly wink at* MURRAY) I thought Fred was slidin' down hill to the train, and him so desperate hurried to get away from here. Look at the knees

on him clappin' together with the great fear he'll be catchin' a sickness in this place! (NICHOLLS, *his guilty conscience stabbed to the quick, turns pale with impotent rage*).

EILEEN. (*remonstrating pitifully*) Father! Please! (*She hurries over to* NICHOLLS. Oh, please don't mind him, Fred! You know what he is when he's drinking.

NICHOLLS. (*thickly*) That's all right—for you to say. But I won't forget—I'm sick and tired standing for—I'm not used to—such people.

EILEEN. (*shrinking from him*) Fred!

NICHOLLS. (*with a furious glance at* MURRAY) Before that cheap slob, too.

EILEEN. (*faintly*) He seems—very nice.

NICHOLLS. You've got your eyes set on him already, have you?

EILEEN. Fred!

NICHOLLS. Well, go ahead if you want to. I don't care. I'll—— (*Startled by the look of anguish which comes over her face, he hastily swallows his words. He takes out watch —fiercely*) We'll miss that train, damn it!

EILEEN. (*in a stricken tone*) Oh, Fred! (*Then forcing back her tears she calls to* CARMODY *in a strained voice*) Father! You'll have to go now.

CARMODY. (*shaking hands with* MURRAY) Keep your eye on her. I'll be out soon to see her and you and me'll have another chin.

MURRAY. Glad to. Good-by for the present. (*He walks to windows on the far right, turning his back considerately on their leave-taking*).

EILEEN. (*comes to* CARMODY *and hangs on his arm as they*

proceed to the door) Be sure and kiss them all for me—and bring them out to see me as soon as you can, Father, please! And don't forget to tell Mrs. Brennan all the directions I gave you coming out on the train. I told her but she mightn't remember—about Mary's bath—and to give Tom his——

CARMODY. (*impatiently*) Hasn't she brought up brats of her own, and doesn't she know the way of it?

EILEEN. (*helplessly*) Never mind telling her, then. I'll write to her.

CARMODY. You'd better not. She'll not wish you mixin' in with her work and tellin' her how to do it.

EILEEN. (*aghast*) *Her* work! (*She seems at the end of her tether—wrung too dry for any further emotion. She kisses her father at the door with indifference and speaks calmly*) Good-by, Father.

CARMODY. (*in a whining tone of injury*) A cold kiss! Is your heart a stone? (*Drunken tears well from his eyes and he blubbers*) And your own father going back to a lone house with a stranger in it!

EILEEN. (*wearily in a dead voice*) You'll miss your train, Father.

CARMODY. (*raging in a second*) I'm off, then! Come on, Fred. It's no welcome we have with her here in this place—and a great curse on this day I brought her to it! (*He stamps out*).

EILEEN. (*in the same dead tone*) Good-by, Fred.

NICHOLLS. (*repenting his words of a moment ago—confusedly*) I'm sorry, Eileen—for what I said. I didn't mean —you know what your father is—excuse me, won't you?

EILEEN. (*without feeling*) Yes.

NICHOLLS. And I'll be out soon—in a week if I can make it. Well then,—good-by for the present. (*He bends down as if to kiss her but she shrinks back out of his reach*).

EILEEN. (*a faint trace of mockery in her weary voice*) No, Fred. Remember you mustn't now.

NICHOLLS. (*in an instant huff*) Oh, if that's the way you feel about—— (*He strides out and slams the door viciously behind him.* EILEEN *walks slowly back toward the fireplace, her face fixed in the dead calm of despair. As she sinks into one of the armchairs, the strain becomes too much. She breaks down, hiding her face in her hands, her frail shoulders heaving with the violence of her sobs. At this sound,* MURRAY *turns from the windows and comes over near her chair*).

MURRAY. (*after watching her for a moment—in an embarrassed tone of sympathy*) Come on, Miss Carmody, that'll never do. I know it's hard at first—but—— It isn't so bad up here—really—once you get used to it! (*The shame she feels at giving way in the presence of a stranger only adds to her loss of control and she sobs heartbrokenly.* MURRAY *walks up and down nervously, visibly nonplussed and upset. Finally he hits upon something*) One of the nurses will be in any minute. You don't want them to see you like this.

EILEEN. (*chokes back her sobs and finally raises her face and attempts a smile*) I'm sorry—to make such a sight of myself.

MURRAY. (*jocularly*) Well, they say a cry does you a lot of good.

EILEEN. (*forcing a smile*) I do feel—better.

MURRAY. (*staring at her with a quizzical smile—cynically*) You shouldn't take those lovers' squabbles so seriously. To-

morrow he'll be sorry. He'll write begging forgiveness. Result—all serene again.

EILEEN. (*a shadow of pain on her face—with dignity*) Don't—please.

MURRAY. (*angry at himself—hanging his head contritely*) Pardon me. I'm rude sometimes—before I know it. (*He shakes off his confusion with a renewed attempt at a joking tone*) You can blame your father for any breaks I make. He told me to see that you behaved.

EILEEN. (*with a genuine smile*) Oh, Father! (*Flushing*) You mustn't mind anything he said tonight.

MURRAY. (*thoughtlessly*) Yes, he was well lit up. I envied him. (EILEEN *looks very shame-faced.* MURRAY *sees it and exclaims in exasperation at himself*) Darn! There I go again putting my foot in it! (*With an irrepressible grin*) I ought to have my tongue operated on—that's what's the matter with me. (*He laughs and throws himself in a chair*).

EILEEN. (*forced in spite of herself to smile with him*) You're candid, at any rate, Mr. Murray.

MURRAY. I said I envied him his jag and that's the truth. The same candor compels me to confess that I was pickled to the gills myself when I arrived here. Fact! I made love to all the nurses and generally disgraced myself—and had a wonderful time.

EILEEN. I suppose it does make you forget your troubles.

MURRAY. (*waving this aside*) I didn't want to forget—not for a second. I wasn't drowning my sorrow. I was hilariously celebrating.

EILEEN. (*astonished—by this time quite interested in this*

queer fellow to the momentary forgetfulness of her own grief) Celebrating—coming here? But—aren't you sick?

MURRAY. Yes, of course. (*Confidentially*) But it's only a matter of time when I'll be all right again. I hope it won't be too soon.

EILEEN. (*with wide eyes*) I wonder if you really mean——

MURRAY. I sure do—every word of it!

EILEEN. (*puzzled*) I can't understand how anyone could—— (*With a worried glance over her shoulder*) I think I'd better look for Miss Gilpin, hadn't I? She may wonder—— (*She half rises from her chair*).

MURRAY. (*quickly*) No. Please don't go yet. (*She glances at him irresolutely, then resumes her chair*) I'll see to it that you don't fracture any rules. (*Hitching his chair nearer hers,—impulsively*) In all charity to me you've got to stick awhile. I haven't had a chance to really talk to a soul for a week. You found what I said a while ago hard to believe, didn't you?

EILEEN. (*with a smile*) You said you hoped you wouldn't get well too soon!

MURRAY. And I meant it! This place is honestly like heaven to me—a lonely heaven till your arrival. (EILEEN *looks embarrassed*) And why wouldn't it be? Just let me tell you what I was getting away from—— (*With a sudden laugh full of a weary bitterness*) Do you know what it means to work from seven at night till three in the morning on a morning newspaper in a town of twenty thousand people—for *ten years?* No. You don't. You can't. But what it did to me—it made me happy—yes, happy!—to get out here!

EILEEN. (*looking at him curiously*) But I always thought being a reporter was so interesting.

MURRAY. (*with a cynical laugh*) On a small town rag? A month of it, perhaps, when you're new to the game. But ten years! With only a raise of a couple of dollars every blue moon or so, and a weekly spree on Saturday night to vary the monotony. (*He laughs again*) Interesting, eh? Getting the dope on the Social of the Queen Esther Circle in the basement of the Methodist Episcopal Church, unable to sleep through a meeting of the Common Council on account of the noisy oratory caused by John Smith's application for a permit to build a house; making a note that a tug boat towed two barges loaded with coal up the river, that Mrs. Perkins spent a week-end with relatives in Hickville, that John Jones—— Oh help! Why go on? I'm a broken man. God, how I used to pray that our Congressman would commit suicide, or the Mayor murder his wife—just to be able to write a real story!

EILEEN. (*with a smile*) Is it as bad as that? But weren't there other things that were interesting?

MURRAY. (*decidedly*) Nope. Never anything new—and I knew everyone and everything in town by heart years ago. (*With sudden bitterness*) Oh, it was my own fault. Why didn't I get out of it? Well, I was always going to—to-morrow—and tomorrow never came. I got in a rut—and stayed put. People seem to get that way, somehow—in that town. It took T. B. to blast me loose.

EILEEN. (*wonderingly*) But—your family——

MURRAY. I haven't much of a family left. My mother died when I was a kid. My father—he was a lawyer—died when I was nineteen, just about to go to college. He left nothing,

so I went to work instead. I've two sisters, respectably married and living in another part of the state. We don't get along —but they're paying for me here, so I suppose I've no kick. (*Cynically*) A family wouldn't have changed things. From what I've seen that blood-thicker-than-water dope is all wrong. It's thinner than table-d'hôte soup. You may have seen a bit of that truth in your own case already.

EILEEN. (*shocked*) How can you say that? You don't know——

MURRAY. Don't I, though? Wait till you've been here three months or four. You'll see then!

EILEEN. (*angrily, her lips trembling*) You must be crazy to say such things! (*Fighting back her tears*) Oh, I think it's hateful—when you see how badly I feel!

MURRAY. (*in acute confusion. Stammering*) Look here, Miss Carmody, I didn't mean to—— Listen—don't feel mad at me, please. I was only talking. I'm like that. You mustn't take it seriously.

EILEEN. (*still resentful*) I don't see how you can talk—when you've just said you had no family of your own, really.

MURRAY. (*eager to return to her good graces*) Of course I don't know. I was just talking regardless for the fun of it.

EILEEN. (*after a pause*) Hasn't either of your sisters any children?

MURRAY. One of them has—two squally little brats.

EILEEN. (*disapprovingly*) You don't like babies?

MURRAY. (*bluntly*) No. (*Then with a grin at her shocked face*) I don't get them. They're something I can't seem to get acquainted with.

EILEEN. (*with a smile, indulgently*) You're a funny per-

son. (*Then with a superior motherly air*) No wonder you couldn't understand how badly I feel. (*With a tender smile*) I've four of them—my brothers and sisters—though they're not what you'd call babies, except to me. I've been a mother to them now for a whole year—ever since our mother died. (*Sadly*) And I don't know how they'll ever get along while I'm away.

MURRAY. (*cynically*) Oh, they'll—— (*He checks what he was going to say and adds lamely*) ——get along somehow.

EILEEN. (*with the same superior tone*) It's easy for you to say that. You don't know how children grow to depend on you for everything. You're not a woman.

MURRAY. (*with a grin*) Are you? (*Then with a chuckle*) You're as old as the pyramids, aren't you? I feel like a little boy. Won't you adopt me, too?

EILEEN. (*flushing, with a shy smile*). Someone ought to. (*Quickly changing the subject*) Do you know, I can't get over what you said about hating your work so. I should think it would be wonderful—to be able to write things.

MURRAY. My job had nothing to do with writing. To write —really write—yes, that's something worth trying for. That's what I've always meant to have a stab at. I've run across ideas enough for stories—that sounded good to me, anyway. (*With a forced laugh*) But—like everything else—I never got down to it. I started one or two—but—either I thought I didn't have the time or—— (*He shrugs his shoulders*).

EILEEN. Well, you've plenty of time now, haven't you?

MURRAY. (*instantly struck by this suggestion*) You mean—— I could write up here? (*She nods. His face lights up with enthusiasm*) Say! That is an idea! Thank you! I'd never

have had sense enough to have thought of that myself. EILEEN *flushes with pleasure*) Sure there's time—nothing but time up here——

EILEEN. Then you seriously think you'll try it?

MURRAY. (*determinedly*) Yes. Why not? I've got to try and do something real sometime, haven't I? I've no excuse not to, now. My mind isn't sick.

EILEEN. (*excitedly*) That'll be wonderful!

MURRAY. (*confidently*) Listen. I've had ideas for a series of short stories for the last couple of years—small town experiences, some of them actual. I know that life too darn well. I ought to be able to write about it. And if I can sell one—to the *Post,* say—I'm sure they'd take the others, too. And then—— I should worry! It'd be easy sailing. But you must promise to help—play critic for me—read them and tell me where they're rotten.

EILEEN. (*pleased but protesting*) Oh, no, I'd never dare. I don't know anything——

MURRAY. Yes, you do. And you started me off on this thing, so you've got to back me up now. (*Suddenly*) Say, I wonder if they'd let me have a typewriter up here?

EILEEN. It'd be fine if they would. I'd like to have one, too—to practice.

MURRAY. I don't see why they wouldn't allow it. You're not sick enough to be kept in bed, I'm sure of that.

EILEEN. I—— I don't know——

MURRAY. Here! None of that! You just think you're not and you won't be. Say, I'm keen on that typewriter idea.

EILEEN. (*eagerly*) And I could type your stories after you've written them! I *could* help that way.

MURRAY. (*smiling*) But I'm quite able—— (*Then seeing how interested she is he adds hurriedly*) That'd be great! I've always been a bum at a machine. And I'd be willing to pay whatever—— (MISS GILPIN *enters from the rear and walks toward them*).

EILEEN. (*quickly*) Oh, no! I'd be glad to get the practice. I wouldn't accept—— (*She coughs slightly*).

MURRAY. (*with a laugh*) Maybe, after you've read my stuff, you won't type it at any price.

MISS GILPIN. Miss Carmody, may I speak to you for a moment, please. (*She takes* EILEEN *aside and talks to her in low tones of admonition.* EILEEN'S *face falls. She nods a horrified acquiescence.* MISS GILPIN *leaves her and goes into the office, rear*).

MURRAY. (*as* EILEEN *comes back. Noticing her perturbation. Kindly*) Well? Now, what's the trouble?

EILEEN. (*her lips trembling*) She told me I mustn't forget to shield my mouth with my handkerchief when I cough.

MURRAY. (*consolingly*) Yes, that's one of the rules, you know.

EILEEN. (*falteringly*) She said they'd give me—a—cup to carry around—— (*She stops, shuddering*).

MURRAY. (*easily*) It's not as bad as it sounds. They're only little paste-board things you carry in your pocket.

EILEEN. (*as if speaking to herself*) It's so horrible. (*She holds out her hand to* MURRAY) I'm to go to my room now. Good-night, Mr. Murray.

MURRAY. (*holding her hand for a moment—earnestly*) Don't mind your first impressions here. You'll look on everything as a matter of course in a few days. I felt your way at first.

(*He drops her hand and shakes his finger at her*) Mind your guardian, now! (*She forces a trembling smile*) See you at breakfast. Good-night. (EILEEN *goes out to the hall in rear.* MISS HOWARD *comes in from the door just after her, carrying a glass of milk*).

MISS HOWARD. Almost bedtime, Mr. Murray. Here's your diet. (*He takes the glass. She smiles at him provokingly*) Well, is it love at first sight?

MURRAY. (*with a grin*) Sure thing! You can consider yourself heartlessly jilted. (*He turns and raises his glass toward the door through which* EILEEN *has just gone, as if toasting her*).

"A glass of milk, and thou
Coughing beside me in the wilderness——
Ah——wilderness were Paradise enow!"

(*He takes a sip of milk*).

MISS HOWARD. (*peevishly*) That's old stuff, Mr. Murray. A patient at Saranac wrote that parody.

MURRAY. (*maliciously*) Aha, you've discovered it's a parody, have you, you sly minx! (MISS HOWARD *turns from him huffily and walks back towards the office, her chin in the air*).

(*The Curtain Falls*)

THE STRAW

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

Scene One

The assembly room of the main building of the sanatorium —early in the morning of a fine day in June, four months later. The room is large, light and airy, painted a fresh white. On the left forward, an armchair. Farther back, a door opening on the main hall. To the rear of this door a pianola on a raised platform. In back of the pianola, a door leading into the office. In the rear wall, a long series of French windows looking out on the lawn, with wooded hills in the far background. Shrubs in flower grow immediately outside the windows. Inside, there is a row of potted plants. In the right wall, rear, four windows. Farther forward, a long, well-filled bookcase, and a doorway leading into the dining room. Following the walls, but about five feet out from them a stiff line of chairs placed closely against each other forms a sort of right-angled auditorium of which the large, square table that stands at center, forward, would seem to be the stage.

From the dining room comes the clatter of dishes, the confused murmur of many voices, male and female—all the mingled sounds of a crowd of people at a meal.

After the curtain rises, DOCTOR STANTON *enters from the hall, followed by a visitor,* MR. SLOAN, *and the assistant physician,* DOCTOR SIMMS. DOCTOR STANTON *is a handsome man of forty-five or so with a grave, care-lined, studious face lightened by a kindly, humorous smile. His gray eyes, saddened by the suf-*

fering they have witnessed, have the sympathetic quality of real understanding. The look they give is full of companionship, the courage-renewing, human companionship of a hope which is shared. He speaks with a slight Southern accent, soft and slurring. DOCTOR SIMMS *is a tall, angular young man with a long, sallow face and a sheepish, self-conscious grin.* MR. SLOAN *is fifty, short and stout, well dressed—one of the successful business men whose endowments have made the Hill Farm a possibility.*

STANTON. (*as they enter*) This is the general assembly room, Mr. Sloan—where the patients of both sexes are allowed to congregate together after meals, for diets, and in the evening.

SLOAN. (*looking around him*) Couldn't be more pleasant, I must say. (*He walks where he can take a peep into the dining room*) Ah, they're all at breakfast, I see.

STANTON. (*smiling*) Yes, and with no lack of appetite, let me tell you. (*With a laugh of proud satisfaction*) They'd sure eat us out of house and home at one sitting, if we'd give them the opportunity.

SLOAN. (*with a smile*) That's fine. (*With a nod toward the dining room*) The ones in there are the sure cures, aren't they?

STANTON. (*a shadow coming over his face*) Strictly speaking, there are no sure cures in this disease, Mr. Sloan. When we permit a patient to return to take up his or her activities in the world, the patient is what we call an arrested case. The disease is overcome, quiescent; the wound is healed over. It's then up to the patient to so take care of himself that this condition remains permanent. It isn't hard for them to do this,

usually. Just ordinary, bull-headed common sense—added to what they've learned here—is enough. And the precautions we teach them to take don't diminish their social usefulness in the slightest, either, as I can prove by our statistics of former patients. (*With a smile*) It's rather early in the morning for statistics, though.

MR. SLOAN. (*with a wave of the hand*) Oh, you needn't. Your reputation in that respect, Doctor—— (STANTON *inclines his head in acknowledgment.* SLOAN *jerks his thumb toward the dining room*) But the ones in there *are* getting well, aren't they?

STANTON. To all appearances, yes. You don't dare swear to it, though. Sometimes, just when a case looks most favorable, there's a sudden, unforeseen breakdown and they have to be sent back to bed, or, if it's very serious, back to the Infirmary again. These are the exceptions, however, not the rule. You can bank on most of those eaters being out in the world and usefully employed within six months.

SLOAN. You couldn't say more than that. (*Abruptly*) But —the unfortunate ones—do you have many deaths?

STANTON. (*with a frown*) No. We're under a very hard, almost cruel imperative which prevents that. If, at the end of six months, a case shows no response to treatment, continues to go down hill—if, in a word, it seems hopeless—we send them away, to one of the State Farms if they have no private means. (*Apologetically*) You see, this sanatorium is overcrowded and has a long waiting list most of the time of others who demand their chance for life. We have to make places for them. We have no time to waste on incurables. There are other places for them—and sometimes, too, a change

is beneficial and they pick up in new surroundings. You never can tell. But we're bound by the rule. It may seem cruel—but it's as near justice to all concerned as we can come.

SLOAN. (*soberly*) I see. (*His eyes fall on the pianola—in surprise*) Ah—a piano.

STANTON. (*replying to the other's thought*) Yes, the patients play and sing. (*With a smile*) If you'd call the noise they make by those terms. They'd dance, too, if we permitted it. There's only one song taboo—Home, Sweet Home—for obvious reasons.

SLOAN. I see. (*With a final look around*) Did I understand you to say this is the only place where the sexes are permitted to mingle?

STANTON. Yes, sir.

SLOAN. (*with a smile*) Not much chance for a love affair, then.

STANTON. (*seriously*) We do our best to prevent them. We even have a strict rule which allows us to step in and put a stop to any intimacy which grows beyond the casual. People up here, Mr. Sloan, are expected to put aside all ideas except the one—getting well.

SLOAN. (*somewhat embarrassed*) A damn good rule, too, under the circumstances.

STANTON. (*with a laugh*) Yes, we're strictly anti-Cupid, sir, from top to bottom. (*Turning to the door to the hall*) And now, if you don't mind, Mr. Sloan, I'm going to turn you footloose to wander about the grounds on an unconducted tour. Today is my busy morning—Saturday. We weigh each patient immediately after breakfast.

SLOAN. Every week?

STANTON. Every Saturday. You see we depend on fluctuations in weight to tell us a lot about the patient's condition. If they gain, or stay at normal, all's usually well. If they lose week after week, we keep careful watch. It's a sign that something's wrong.

SLOAN. (*with a smile*) Well, you just shoo me off wherever you please and go on with the good work. I'll be glad of a ramble in the open.

STANTON. After the weighing is over, sir, I'll be free to——

(*His words are lost as the three go out. A moment later,* EILEEN *enters from the dining room. She has grown stouter, her face has more of a healthy, out-of-door color, but there is still about her the suggestion of being worn down by a burden too oppressive for her strength. She is dressed in shirtwaist and dark skirt. She goes to the armchair, left forward, and sinks down on it. She is evidently in a state of nervous depression; she twists her fingers together in her lap; her eyes stare sadly before her; she clenches her upper lip with her teeth to prevent its trembling. She has hardly regained control over herself when* STEPHEN MURRAY *comes in hurriedly from the dining room and, seeing her at his first glance, walks quickly over to her chair. He is the picture of health, his figure has filled out solidly, his tanned face beams with suppressed exultation*).

MURRAY. (*excitedly*) Eileen! I saw you leave your table. I've something to tell you. I didn't get a chance last night after the mail came. Just listen, Eileen—it's too good to be true—but on that mail—guess what?

EILEEN. (*forgetting her depression—with an excited smile*) I know! You've sold your story!

MURRAY. (*triumphantly*) Go to the head of the class. What d'you know about that for luck! My first, too—and only the third magazine I sent it to! (*He cuts a joyful caper*).

EILEEN. (*happily*) Isn't that wonderful, Stephen! But I knew all the time you would. The story's so good.

MURRAY. Well, you might have known but I didn't think there was a chance in the world. And as for being good—— (*With superior air*)—wait till I turn loose with the real big ones, the kind I'm going to write. Then I'll make them sit up and take notice. They can't stop me now. And I haven't told you the best part. The editor wrote saying how much he liked the yarn and asked me for more of the same kind.

EILEEN. And you've the three others about the same person —just as good, too! (*She claps her hands delightedly*).

MURRAY. And I can send them out right away. They're all typed, thanks to you. That's what's brought me luck, I know. I never had a bit by myself. (*Then, after a quick glance around to make sure they are alone, he bends down and kisses her*) There! A token of gratitude—even if it is against the rules.

EILEEN. (*flushing—with timid happiness*) Stephen! You mustn't! They'll see.

MURRAY. (*boldly*) Let them!

EILEEN. But you know—they've warned us against being so much together, already.

MURRAY. Let them! We'll be out of this prison soon. (EILEEN *shakes her head sadly but he does not notice*) Oh, I wish you could leave when I do. We'd have some celebration together.

EILEEN. (*her lips trembling*) I was thinking last night—

that you'd be going away. You look so well. Do you think—they'll let you go—soon?

MURRAY. You bet I do. I caught Stanton in the hall last night and asked him if I could go.

EILEEN. (*anxiously*) What did he say?

MURRAY. He only smiled and said: "We'll see if you gain weight tomorrow." As if that mattered now! Why, I'm way above normal as it is! But you know Stanton—always putting you off.

EILEEN. (*slowly*) Then—if you gain today——

MURRAY. He'll let me go. I'm going to insist on it.

EILEEN. Then—you'll leave——?

MURRAY. The minute I can get packed.

EILEEN. (*trying to force a smile*) Oh, I'm so glad—for your sake; but—I'm selfish—it'll be so lonely here without you.

MURRAY. (*consolingly*) You'll be going away yourself before long. (EILEEN *shakes her head. He goes on without noticing, wrapped in his own success*) Oh, Eileen, you can't imagine all it opens up for me—selling that story. I can go straight to New York, and live, and meet real people who are doing things. I can take my time, and try and do the work I hope to. (*Feelingly*) You don't know how grateful I am to you, Eileen—how you've helped me. Oh, I don't mean just the typing, I mean your encouragement, your faith! The stories would never have been written if it hadn't been for you.

EILEEN. (*choking back a sob*) I didn't do—anything.

MURRAY. (*staring down at her—with rough kindliness*) Here, here, that'll never do! You're not weeping about it, are you, silly? (*He pats her on the shoulder*) What's the matter, Eileen? You didn't eat a thing this morning. I was

watching you. (*With kindly severity*) That's no way to gain weight you know. You'll have to feed up. Do you hear what your guardian commands, eh?

EILEEN. (*with dull hopelessness*) I know I'll lose again. I've been losing steadily the past three weeks.

MURRAY. Here! Don't you dare talk that way! Why, you've been picking up wonderfully—until just lately. Even the old Doc has told you how much he admired your pluck, and how much better you were getting. You're not going to quit now, are you?

EILEEN. (*despairingly*) Oh, I don't care! I don't care—now.

MURRAY. Now? What do you mean by that? What's happened to make things any different?

EILEEN. (*evasively*) Oh—nothing. Don't ask me, Stephen.

MURRAY. (*with sudden anger*) I don't have to ask you. I can guess. Another letter from home—or from that ass, eh?

EILEEN. (*shaking her head*) No, it isn't that. (*She looks at him as if imploring him to comprehend*).

MURRAY. (*furiously*) Of course, you'd deny it. You always do. But don't you suppose I've got eyes? It's been the same damn thing all the time you've been here. After every nagging letter—thank God they don't write often any more!—you've been all in; and after their Sunday visits—you can thank God they've been few, too—you're utterly knocked out. It's a shame!

EILEEN. Stephen!

MURRAY. (*relentlessly*) They've done nothing but worry and torment you and do their best to keep you from getting well.

EILEEN. (*faintly*) You're not fair, Stephen.

MURRAY. Rot! When it isn't your father grumbling about expense, it's the kids, or that stupid housekeeper, or that slick Aleck, Nicholls, with his cowardly lies. Which is it this time?

EILEEN. (*pitifully*) None of them.

MURRAY. (*explosively*) But him, especially—the dirty cad! Oh, I've got a rich notion to pay a call on that gentleman when I leave and tell him what I think of him.

EILEEN. (*quickly*) No—you mustn't ever! He's not to blame. If you knew—— (*She stops, lowering her eyes in confusion*).

MURRAY. (*roughly*) Knew what? You make me sick, Eileen —always finding excuses for him. I never could understand what a girl like you could see—— But what's the use? I've said all this before. You're wasting yourself on a—— (*Rudely*) Love must be blind. And yet you say you don't love him, really?

EILEEN. (*shaking her head—helplessly*) But I do—like Fred. We've been good friends so many years. I don't want to hurt him—his pride——

MURRAY. That's the same as answering no to my question. Then, if you don't love him, why don't you write and tell him to go to—— break it off? (EILEEN *bows her head but doesn't reply. Irritated,* MURRAY *continues brutally*) Are you afraid it would break his heart? Don't be a fool! The only way you could do that would be to deprive him of his meals.

EILEEN. (*springing to her feet—distractedly*) Please stop, Stephen! You're cruel! And you've been so kind—the only real friend I've had up here. Don't spoil it all now.

MURRAY. (*remorsefully*) I'm sorry, Eileen. I won't say

another word. (*Irritably*) Still someone ought to say or do something to put a stop to——

EILEEN. (*with a broken laugh*) Never mind. Everything will stop—soon, now!

MURRAY. (*suspiciously*) What do you mean?

EILEEN. (*with an attempt at a careless tone*) Nothing. If you can't see—— (*She turns to him with sudden intensity*) Oh, Stephen, if you only knew how wrong you are about everything you've said. It's all true; but it isn't that—any of it—any more—— that's—— Oh, I can't tell you!

MURRAY. (*with great interest*) Please do, Eileen!

EILEEN. (*with a helpless laugh*) No.

MURRAY. Please tell me what it is! Let me help you.

EILEEN. No. It wouldn't be any use, Stephen.

MURRAY. (*offended*) Why do you say that? Haven't I helped before?

EILEEN. Yes—but this——

MURRAY. Come now! 'Fess up! What is "this"?

EILEEN. No. I couldn't speak of it here, anyway. They'll all be coming out soon.

MURRAY. (*insistently*) Then when? Where?

EILEEN. Oh, I don't know—perhaps never, nowhere. I don't know—— Sometime before you leave, maybe.

MURRAY. But I may go tomorrow morning—if I gain weight and Stanton lets me.

EILEEN. (*sadly*) Yes, I was forgetting—you were going right away. (*Dully*) Then nowhere I suppose—never. (*Glancing toward the dining room*) They're all getting up. Let's not talk about it any more—now.

MURRAY. (*stubbornly*) But you'll tell me later, Eileen? You must.

EILEEN. (*vaguely*) Perhaps. It depends—— (*The patients, about forty in number, straggle in from the dining room by twos and threes, chatting in low tones. The men and women with few exceptions separate into two groups, the women congregating in the left right angle of chairs, the men sitting or standing in the right right angle. In appearance, most of the patients are tanned, healthy, and cheerful looking. The great majority are under middle age. Their clothes are of the cheap, readymade variety. They are all distinctly of the wage-earning class. They might well be a crowd of cosmopolitan factory workers gathered together after a summer vacation. A hollow-chestedness and a tendency to round shoulders may be detected as a common characteristic. A general air of tension, marked by frequent bursts of laughter in too high a key, seems to pervade the throng.* MURRAY *and* EILEEN, *as if to avoid contact with the others, come over to the right in front of the dining-room door*).

MURRAY. (*in a low voice*) Listen to them laugh. Did you ever notice—perhaps it's my imagination—how forced they act on Saturday mornings before they're weighed?

EILEEN. (*dully*) No.

MURRAY. Can't you tell me that secret now? No one'll hear.

EILEEN. (*vehemently*) No, no, how could I? Don't speak of it! (*A sudden silence falls on all the groups at once. Their eyes, by a common impulse turn quickly toward the door to the hall*).

A WOMAN. (*nervously—as if this moment's silent pause oppressed her*) Play something, Peters. They ain't coming yet.

(PETERS, *a stupid-looking young fellow with a sly, twisted smirk which gives him the appearance of perpetually winking his eye, detaches himself from a group on the right. All join in with urging exclamations: "Go on, Peters! Go to it! Pedal up, Pete! Give us a rag! That's the boy, Peters!" etc.*).

PETERS. Sure, if I got time. (*He goes to the pianola and puts in a roll. The mingled conversation and laughter bursts forth again as he sits on the bench and starts pedaling*).

MURRAY. (*disgustedly*) It's sure good to think I won't have to listen to that old tin-pan being banged much longer! (*The music interrupts him—a quick rag. The patients brighten, hum, whistle, sway their heads or tap their feet in time to the tune.* DOCTOR STANTON *and* DOCTOR SIMMS *appear in the doorway from the hall. All eyes are turned on them*).

STANTON. (*raising his voice*)—They all seem to be here, Doctor. We might as well start. (MRS. TURNER, *the matron, comes in behind them—a stout, motherly, capable-looking woman with gray hair. She hears* STANTON'S *remark*).

MRS. TURNER. And take temperatures after, Doctor?

STANTON. Yes, Mrs. Turner. I think that's better today.

MRS. TURNER. All right, Doctor. (STANTON *and the assistant go out.* MRS. TURNER *advances a step or so into the room and looks from one group of patients to the other, inclining her head and smiling benevolently. All force smiles and nod in recognition of her greeting.* PETERS, *at the pianola, lets the music slow down, glancing questioningly at the matron to see if she is going to order it stopped. Then, encouraged by her smile, his feet pedal harder than ever*).

MURRAY. Look at old Mrs. Grundy's eyes pinned on us!

She'll accuse us of being too familiar again, the old wench!

EILEEN. Ssshh. You're wrong. She's looking at me, not at us.

MURRAY. At you? Why?

EILEEN. I ran a temperature yesterday. It must have oeen over a hundred last night.

MURRAY. (*with consoling scepticism*) You're always suffering for trouble, Eileen. How do you know you ran a temp? You didn't see the stick, I suppose?

EILEEN. No—but—I could tell. I felt feverish and chilly. It must have been way up.

MURRAY. Bosh! If it was you'd have been sent to bed.

EILEEN. That's why she's looking at me. (*Piteously*) Oh, I do hope I won't be sent back to bed! I don't know what I'd do. If I could only gain this morning. If my temp has only gone down! (*Hopelessly*) But I feel—— I didn't sleep a wink—thinking——

MURRAY. (*roughly*) You'll persuade yourself you've got leprosy in a second. Don't be a nut! It's all imagination, I tell you. You'll gain. Wait and see if you don't. (EILEEN *shakes her head. A metallic rumble and jangle comes from the hallway. Everyone turns in that direction with nervous expectancy*).

MRS. TURNER. (*admonishingly*) Mr. Peters!

PETERS. Yes, ma'am. (*He stops playing and rejoins the group of men on the right. In the midst of a silence broken only by hushed murmurs of conversation,* DOCTOR STANTON *appears in the hall doorway. He turns to help his assistant wheel in a Fairbanks scale on castors. They place the scale against*

the wall immediately to the rear of the doorway. DOCTOR SIMMS *adjusts it to a perfect balance*).

DOCTOR STANTON. (*takes a pencil from his pocket and opens the record book he has in his hand*) All ready, Doctor?

DOCTOR SIMMS. Just a second, sir.

MURRAY. (*with a nervous smile*) Well, we're all set. Here's hoping!

EILEEN. You'll gain, I'm sure you will. You look so well.

MURRAY. Oh—I—I wasn't thinking of myself, I'm a sure thing. I was betting on you. I've simply got to gain today, when so much depends on it.

EILEEN. Yes, I hope you—— (*She falters brokenly and turns away from him*).

DOCTOR SIMMS. (*straightening up*) All ready, Doctor.

STANTON. (*nods and glances at his book—without raising his voice—distinctly*) Mrs. Abner. (*A middle-aged woman comes and gets on the scales.* SIMMS *adjusts it to her weight of the previous week which* STANTON *reads to him from the book in a low voice, and weighs her*).

MURRAY. (*with a relieved sigh*) They're off. (*Noticing* EILEEN'S *downcast head and air of dejection*) Here! Buck up, Eileen! Old Lady Grundy's watching you—and it's your turn in a second. (EILEEN *raises her head and forces a frightened smile.* MRS. ABNER *gets down off the scales with a pleased grin. She has evidently gained. She rejoins the group of women, chattering volubly in low tones. Her exultant "gained half a pound" can be heard. The other women smile their perfunctory congratulations, their eyes absent-minded, intent on their own worries.* STANTON *writes down the weight in the book*).

STANTON. Miss Bailey. (*A young girl goes to the scales*).

MURRAY. Bailey looks badly, doesn't she?

EILEEN. (*her lips trembling*) She's been losing, too.

MURRAY. Well, *you're* going to gain today. Remember, now!

EILEEN. (*with a feeble smile*) I'll try to obey your orders. (MISS BAILEY *gets down off the scales. Her eyes are full of despondency although she tries to make a brave face of it, forcing a laugh as she joins the women. They stare at her with pitying looks and murmur consoling phrases*).

EILEEN. She's lost again. Oh, I wish I didn't have to get weighed——

STANTON. Miss Carmody. (EILEEN *starts nervously*).

MURRAY. (*as she leaves him*) Remember now! Break the scales! (*She walks quickly to the scales, trying to assume an air of defiant indifference. The balance stays down as she steps up.* EILEEN'S *face shows her despair at this.* SIMMS *weighs her and gives the poundage in a low voice to* STANTON. EILEEN *steps down mechanically, then hesitates as if not knowing where to turn, her anguished eyes flitting from one group to another*).

MURRAY. (*savagely*) Damn! (DOCTOR STANTON *writes the figures in his book, glances sharply at* EILEEN, *and then nods significantly to* MRS. TURNER *who is standing beside him*).

STANTON. (*calling the next*) Miss Doeffler. (*Another woman comes to be weighed*).

MRS. TURNER. Miss Carmody! Will you come here a moment, please?

EILEEN. (*her face growing very pale*) Yes, Mrs. Turner. (*The heads of the different groups bend together. Their eyes follow* EILEEN *as they whisper.* MRS. TURNER *leads her down front, left. Behind them the weighing of the women continues briskly. The great majority have gained. Those who have not*

have either remained stationary or lost a negligible fraction of a pound. So, as the weighing proceeds, the general air of smiling satisfaction rises among the groups of women. Some of them, their ordeal over, go out through the hall doorway by twos and threes with suppressed laughter and chatter. As they pass behind EILEEN *they glance at her with pitying curiosity.* DOCTOR STANTON'S *voice is heard at regular intervals calling the names in alphabetical order: Mrs. Elbing, Miss Finch, Miss Grimes, Miss Haines, Miss Hayes, Miss Jutner, Miss Linowski, Mrs. Marini, Mrs. McCoy, Miss McElroy, Miss Nelson, Mrs. Nott, Mrs. O'Brien, Mrs. Olson, Miss Paul, Miss Petrovski, Mrs. Quinn, Miss Robersi, Mrs. Stattler, Miss Unger).*

MRS. TURNER. (*putting her hand on* EILEEN'S *shoulder—kindly*) You're not looking so well, lately, my dear, do you know it?

EILEEN (*bravely*) I feel—fine. (*Her eyes, as if looking for encouragement, seek* MURRAY *who is staring at her worriedly*).

MRS. TURNER. (*gently*) You lost weight again, you know.

EILEEN. I know—but——

MRS. TURNER. This is the fourth week.

EILEEN. I—— I know it is——

MRS. TURNER. I've been keeping my eye on you. You seem —worried. Are you upset about—something we don't know?

EILEEN. (*quickly*) No, no! I haven't slept much lately. That must be it.

MRS. TURNER. Are you worrying about your condition? Is that what keeps you awake?

EILEEN. No.

MRS. TURNER. You're sure it's not that?

EILEEN. Yes, I'm sure it's not, Mrs. Turner.

MRS. TURNER. I was going to tell you if you were: Don't do it! You can't expect it to be all smooth sailing. Even the most favorable cases have to expect these little setbacks. A few days' rest in bed will start you on the right trail again.

EILEEN. (*in anguish, although she has realized this was coming*) Bed? Go back to bed? Oh, Mrs. Turner!

MRS. TURNER. (*gently*). Yes, my dear, Doctor Stanton thinks it best. So when you go back to your cottage——

EILEEN. Oh, please—not today—not right away!

MRS. TURNER. You had a temperature and a high pulse yesterday, didn't you realize it? And this morning you look quite feverish. (*She tries to put her hand on* EILEEN'S *forehead but the latter steps away defensively*).

EILEEN. It's only—not sleeping last night. Oh, I'm sure it'll go away.

MRS. TURNER. (*consolingly*) When you lie still and have perfect rest, of course it will.

EILEEN. (*with a longing look over at* MURRAY) But not today—please, Mrs. Turner.

MRS. TURNER. (*looking at her keenly*) There is something upsetting you. You've something on your mind that you can't tell me, is that it? (EILEEN *maintains a stubborn silence*). But think—*can't* you tell me? (*With a kindly smile*) I'm used to other people's troubles. I've been playing mother-confessor to the patients for years now, and I think I've usually been able to help them. Can't you confide in me, child? (EILEEN *drops her eyes but remains silent.* MRS. TURNER *glances meaningly over at* MURRAY *who is watching them whenever he thinks the matron is not aware of it—a note of sharp rebuke in her voice*) I think I can guess your secret. You've let other

notions become more important to you than the idea of getting well. And you've no excuse for it. After I had to warn you a month ago, I expected *that* silliness to stop instantly.

EILEEN. (*her face flushed—protesting*) Nothing like that has anything to do with it.

MRS. TURNER. (*sceptically*) What is it that has, then?

EILEEN. (*lying determinedly*) It's my family. They keep writing—and worrying me—and—— That's what it is, Mrs. Turner.

MRS. TURNER. (*not exactly knowing whether to believe this or not—probing the girl with her eyes*) Your father?

EILEEN. Yes, all of them. (*Suddenly seeing a way to discredit all of the matron's suspicions—excitedly*) And principally the young man I'm engaged to—the one who came to visit me several times——

MRS. TURNER. (*surprised*) So—you're engaged? (EILEEN *nods.* MRS. TURNER *immediately dismisses her suspicions*) Oh, pardon me. I didn't know that, you see, or I wouldn't—— (*She pats* EILEEN *on the shoulder comfortingly*) Never mind. You'll tell me all about it, won't you?

EILEEN. (*desperately*) Yes. (*She seems about to go on but the matron interrupts her*).

MRS. TURNER. Oh, not here, my dear. Not now. Come to my room—let me see—I'll be busy all morning—sometime this afternoon. Will you do that?

EILEEN. Yes. (*Joyfully*) Then I needn't go to bed right away?

MRS. TURNER. No—on one condition. You mustn't take any exercise. Stay in your recliner all day and rest and remain in bed tomorrow morning.

EILEEN. I promise, Mrs. Turner.

MRS. TURNER. (*smiling in dismissal*) Very well, then. I'll see you this afternoon.

EILEEN. Yes, Mrs. Turner. (*The matron goes to the rear where* MISS BAILEY *is sitting with* MRS. ABNER. *She beckons to* MISS BAILEY *who gets up with a scared look, and they go to the far left corner of the room.* EILEEN *stands for a moment hesitating—then starts to go to* MURRAY, *but just at this moment* PETERS *comes forward and speaks to* MURRAY).

PETERS. (*with his sly twisted grin*) Say, Carmody musta lost fierce. Did yuh see the Old Woman handin' her an earful? Sent her back to bed, I betcha. What d'yuh think?

MURRAY. (*impatiently, showing his dislike*) How the hell do I know?

PETERS. (*sneeringly*) Huh, you don't know nothin' 'bout her, I s'pose? Where d'yuh get that stuff?

MURRAY. (*with cold rage before which the other slinks away*) If it wasn't for other people losing weight you couldn't get any joy out of life, could you? (*Roughly*) Get away from me! (*He makes a threatening gesture*).

PETERS. (*beating a snarling retreat*) Wait'n' see if yuh don't lose too, yuh stuck-up boob! (*Seeing that* MURRAY *is alone again,* EILEEN *starts toward him but this time she is intercepted by* MRS. ABNER *who stops on her way out. The weighing of the women is now finished, and that of the men, which proceeds much quicker, begins*).

DOCTOR STANTON. Anderson! (ANDERSON *comes to the scales. The men all move down to the left to wait their turn, with the exception of* MURRAY, *who remains by the dining room door, fidgeting impatiently, anxious for a word with* EILEEN).

MRS. ABNER. (*taking* EILEEN'S *arm*) Coming over to the cottage, dearie?

EILEEN. Not just this minute, Mrs. Abner. I have to wait——

MRS. ABNER. For the Old Woman? You lost today, didn't you? Is she sendin' you to bed, the old devil?

EILEEN. Yes, I'm afraid I'll have to——

MRS. ABNER. She's a mean one, ain't she? I gained this week —half a pound. Lord, I'm gettin' fat! All my clothes are gittin' too small for me. Don't know what I'll do. Did you lose much, dearie?

EILEEN. Three pounds.

MRS. ABNER. Ain't that awful! (*hastening to make up for this thoughtless remark*) All the same, what's three pounds! You can git them back in a week after you're resting more. You've been runnin' a temp, too, ain't you? (EILEEN *nods*) Don't worry about it, dearie. It'll go down. Worryin's the worst. Me, I don't never worry none. (*She chuckles with satisfaction—then soberly*) I just been talkin' with Bailey. She's got to go to bed, too, I guess. She lost two pounds. She ain't runnin' no temp though.

STANTON. Barnes! (*Another man comes to the scales*).

MRS. ABNER. (*in a mysterious whisper*) Look at Mr. Murray, dearie. Ain't he nervous today? I don't know as I blame him, either. I heard the doctor said he'd let him go home if he gained today. Is it true, d'you know?

EILEEN. (*dully*) I don't know.

MRS. ABNER. Gosh, I wish it was me! My old man's missin' me like the dickens, he writes. (*She starts to go*) You'll be

over to the cottage in a while, won't you? Me'n' you'll have a game of casino, eh?

EILEEN. (*happy at this deliverance*) Yes, I'll be glad to.

STANTON—Cordero! (MRS. ABNER *goes out.* EILEEN *again starts toward* MURRAY *but this time* FLYNN, *a young fellow with a brick-colored, homely, good-natured face, and a shaven-necked haircut, slouches back to* MURRAY. EILEEN *is brought to a halt in front of the table where she stands, her face working with nervous strain, clasping and unclasping her trembling hands*).

FLYNN. (*curiously*) Say, Steve, what's this bull about the Doc lettin' yuh beat it if yuh gain today? Is is straight goods?

MURRAY. He said he might, that's all. (*Impatiently*) How the devil did that story get traveling around?

FLYNN. (*with a grin*) Wha' d'yuh expect with this gang of skirts chewin' the fat? Well, here's hopin' yuh come home a winner, Steve.

MURRAY. (*gratefully*) Thanks. (*With confidence*) Oh, I'll gain all right; but whether he'll let me go or not—— (*He shrugs his shoulders*).

FLYNN. Make 'em behave. I wisht Stanton'd ask waivers on me. (*With a laugh*) I oughter gain a ton today. I ate enough spuds for breakfast to plant a farm.

STANTON. Flynn!

FLYNN. Me to the plate! (*He strides to the scales*).

MURRAY. Good luck! (*He starts to join* EILEEN *but* MISS BAILEY, *who has finished her talk with* MRS. TURNER, *who goes out to the hall, approaches* EILEEN *at just this moment.* MURRAY *stops in his tracks, fuming. He and* EILEEN *exchange a glance of helpless annoyance*).

MISS BAILEY. (*her thin face full of the satisfaction of*

misery finding company—plucks at EILEEN's *sleeve*) Say, Carmody, she sent you back to bed, too, didn't she?

EILEEN. (*absent-mindedly*) I suppose——

MISS BAILEY. You suppose? Of course she did. I got to go, too. (*Pulling* EILEEN's *sleeve*) Come on. Let's get out of here. I hate this place, don't you?

STANTON. (*calling the next*) Hopper!

FLYNN. (*shouts to* MURRAY *as he is going out to the hall*) I hit 'er for a two-bagger, Steve. Come on now, Bo, and bring me home! 'Atta boy! (*Grinning gleefully, he slouches out.* DOCTOR STANTON *and all the patients laugh*).

MISS BAILEY. (*with irritating persistence*) Come on, Carmody. You've got to go to bed, too.

EILEEN. (*at the end of her patience—releasing her arm from the other's grasp*) Let me alone, will you? I don't have to go to bed now—not till tomorrow morning.

MISS BAILEY. (*in a whining rage*) Why not? You've been running a temp, too, and I haven't! You must have a pull, that's what! It isn't fair. I'll bet you lost more than I did, too! What right have you got—— Well, I'm not going to bed if you don't. Wait 'n' see!

EILEEN. (*turning away revolted*) Go away! Leave me alone, please.

STANTON. Lowenstein!

MISS BAILEY. (*turns to the hall door, whining*) All right for you! I'm going to find out. It isn't square. I'll write home. (*She disappears in the hallway.* MURRAY *strides over to* EILEEN *whose strength seems to have left her and who is leaning weakly against the table*).

MURRAY. Thank God—at last! Isn't it hell—all these fools!

I couldn't get to you. What did Old Lady Grundy have to say to you? I saw her giving me a hard look. Was it about us—the old stuff? (EILEEN *nods with downcast eyes*) What did she say? Never mind now. You can tell me in a minute. It's my turn next. (*His eyes glance toward the scales*).

EILEEN. (*intensely*) Oh, Stephen, I wish you weren't going away!

MURRAY. (*excitedly*). Maybe I'm not. It's like gambling —if I win——

STANTON. Murray!

MURRAY. Wait here, Eileen. (*He goes to the scales.* EILEEN *keeps her back turned. Her body stiffens rigidly in the intensity of her conflicting emotions. She stares straight ahead, her eyes full of anguish.* MURRAY *steps on the scales nervously. The balance rod hits the top smartly. He has gained. His face lights up and he heaves a great sigh of relief.* EILEEN *seems to sense this outcome and her head sinks, her body sags weakly and seems to shrink to a smaller size.* MURRAY *gets off the scales, his face beaming with a triumphant smile.* DOCTOR STANTON *smiles and murmurs something to him in a low voice.* MURRAY *nods brightly; then turns back to* EILEEN).

STANTON. Nathan! (*Another patient advances to the scales*).

MURRAY. (*trying to appear casual*) Well—three rousing cheers! Stanton told me to come to his office at eleven. That means a final exam—and release!

EILEEN. (*dully*) So you gained?

MURRAY. Three pounds.

EILEEN. Funny—I lost three. (*With a pitiful effort at a*

smile) I hope you gained the ones I lost. (*Her lips tremble*) So you're surely going away.

MURRAY. (*his joy fleeing as he is confronted with her sorrow —slowly*). It looks that way, Eileen.

EILEEN. (*in a trembling whisper broken by rising sobs*) Oh —I'm so glad—you gained—the ones I lost, Stephen—— So glad! (*She breaks down, covering her face with her hands, stifling her sobs*).

MURRAY. (*alarmed*) Eileen! What's the matter? (*Desperately*) Stop it! Stanton'll see you!

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT TWO

Scene Two

Midnight of the same day. A crossroads near the sanatorium. The main road comes down forward from the right. A smaller road, leading down from the left, joins it toward left, center.

Dense woods rise sheer from the grass and bramble-grown ditches at the road's sides. At the junction of the two roads there is a signpost, its arms pointing toward the right and the left, rear. A pile of round stones is at the road corner, left forward. A full moon, riding high overhead, throws the roads into white shadowless relief and masses the woods into walls of compact blackness. The trees lean heavily together, their branches motionless, unstirred by any trace of wind.

As the curtain rises, EILEEN *is discovered standing in the middle of the road, front center. Her face shows white and clear in the bright moonlight as she stares with anxious expectancy up the road to the left. Her body is fixed in an attitude of rigid immobility as if she were afraid a slightest movement would break the spell of silence and awaken the unknown. She has shrunk instinctively as far away as she can from the mysterious darkness which rises at the road's sides like an imprisoning wall. A sound of hurried footfalls, muffled by the dust, comes from the road she is watching. She gives a startled gasp. Her eyes strain to identify the oncomer. Uncertain, trembling, with fright, she hesitates a second; then darts to the side of the road and crouches down in the shadow.*

STEPHEN MURRAY *comes down the road from the left. He stops by the sign post and peers about him. He wears a cap, the peak of which casts his face into shadow. Finally he calls in a low voice:*

MURRAY. Eileen!

EILEEN. (*coming out quickly from her hiding place—with a glad little cry*) Stephen! At last! (*She runs to him as if she were going to fling her arms about him but stops abashed. He reaches out and takes her hands*).

MURRAY. It can't be twelve yet. (*He leads her to the pile of stones to the left*) I haven't heard the village clock.

EILEEN. I must have come early. It seemed as if I'd been waiting for ages.

MURRAY. How your hands tremble! Were you frightened?

EILEEN. (*forcing a smile*) A little. The woods are so black and queer looking. I'm all right now.

MURRAY. Sit down. You must rest. (*In a tone of annoyed reproof*) I am going to read you a lecture, young lady. You shouldn't ever have done this—running a temp and—— Good heavens, don't you want to get well?

EILEEN. (*dully*) I don't know——

MURRAY. (*irritably*) You make me ill when you talk that way, Eileen. It doesn't sound like you at all. What's come over you lately? I was—knocked out—when I read the note you slipped me after supper. I didn't get a chance to read it until late, I was so busy packing, and by that time you'd gone to your cottage. If I could have reached you any way I'd have refused to come here, I tell you straight. But I couldn't —and I knew you'd be here waiting—and—still, I feel guilty.

Damn it, this isn't the thing for you! You ought to be in bed asleep.

EILEEN. (*humbly*) Please, Stephen, don't scold me.

MURRAY. How the devil did you ever get the idea—meeting me here at this ungodly hour?

EILEEN. You'd told me about your sneaking out to go to the village, and I thought there'd be no harm this one night—the last night.

MURRAY. But I'm well. I've been well. It's different. You—— Honest, Eileen, you shouldn't lose sleep and tax your strength.

EILEEN. Don't scold me, please. I'll make up for it. I'll rest all the time—after you're gone. I just had to see you some way. (*A clock in the distant village begins striking*) Ssshh! Listen.

MURRAY. That's twelve now. You see I was early. (*In a pause of silence they wait motionlessly until the last mournful note dies in the hushed woods*).

EILEEN. (*in a stifled voice*) It isn't tomorrow now, is it? It's today—the day you're going.

MURRAY. (*something in her voice making him avert his face and kick at the heap of stones on which she is sitting—brusquely*) Well, I hope you took precautions so you wouldn't be caught sneaking out.

EILEEN—I did just what you'd told me you did—stuffed the pillows under the clothes so the watchman would think I was there.

MURRAY. None of the patients on your porch saw you leave, did they?

EILEEN. No. They were all asleep.

MURRAY. That's all right, then. I wouldn't trust any of that bunch of women. They'd be only too tickled to squeal on you. (*There is an uncomfortable pause.* MURRAY *seems waiting for her to speak. He looks about him at the trees, up into the moonlit sky, breathing in the fresh night air with a healthy delight.* EILEEN *remains with downcast head, staring at the road*) It's beautiful tonight, isn't it? Worth losing sleep for.

EILEEN. (*dully*) Yes. (*Another pause—finally she murmurs faintly*) Are you leaving early?

MURRAY. The ten-forty. Leave the San at ten, I guess.

EILEEN. You're going home?

MURRAY. Home? No. But I'm going to see my sisters—just to say hello. I've got to, I suppose.

EILEEN. I'm sure—I've often felt—you're unjust to your sisters. (*With conviction*) I'm sure they must both love you.

MURRAY. (*frowning*) Maybe, in their own way. But what's love without a glimmer of understanding—a nuisance! They've never seen the real me and never wanted to.

EILEEN. (*as if to herself*) What is—the real you? (MURRAY *kicks at the stones impatiently without answering.* EILEEN *hastens to change the subject*) And then you'll go to New York?

MURRAY. (*interested at once*) Yes. You bet.

EILEEN. And write more?

MURRAY. Not in New York, no. I'm going there to take a vacation and really enjoy myself for a while. I've enough money for that as it is and if the other stories you typed sell—I'll be as rich as Rockefeller. I might even travel—— No, I've got to make good with my best stuff first. I know what I'll do. When I've had enough of New York, I'll rent a place

in the country—some old farmhouse—and live alone there and work. (*Lost in his own plans—with pleasure*) That's the right idea, isn't it?

EILEEN. (*trying to appear enthused*) It ought to be fine for your work. (*After a pause*) They're fine, those stories you wrote here. They're—so much like you. I'd know it was you wrote them even if—I didn't know.

MURRAY. (*pleased*) Wait till you read the others I'm going to do! (*After a slight pause—with a good-natured grin*) Here I am talking about myself again! But you don't know how good it is to have your dreams coming true. It'd make an egotist out of anyone.

EILEEN. (*sadly*) No. I don't know. But I love to hear you talk of yours.

MURRAY. (*with an embarrassed laugh*) Thanks. Well, I've certainly told you all of them. You're the only one—— (*He stops and abruptly changes the subject*) You said in your note that you had something important to tell me. (*He sits down beside her, crossing his legs*) Is it about your interview with Old Mrs. Grundy this afternoon?

EILEEN. No, that didn't amount to anything. She seemed mad because I told her so little. I think she guessed I only told her what I did so she'd let me stay, maybe—your last day,—and to keep her from thinking what she did—about us.

MURRAY. (*quickly, as if he wishes to avoid this subject*) What is it you wanted to tell me, then?

EILEEN. (*sadly*) It doesn't seem so important now, somehow. I suppose it was silly of me to drag you out here, just for that. It can't mean anything to you—much.

MURRAY. (*encouragingly*) How do you know it can't?

EILEEN. (*slowly*) I only thought—you might like to know.

MURRAY. (*interestedly*) Know what? What is it? If I can help——

EILEEN. No. (*after a moment's hesitation*) I wrote to him this afternoon.

MURRAY. Him?

EILEEN. The letter you've been advising me to write.

MURRAY. (*as if the knowledge of this alarmed him—haltingly*) You mean—Fred Nicholls?

EILEEN. Yes.

MURRAY. (*after a pause—uncomfortably*) You mean—you broke it all off?

EILEEN. Yes—for good. (*She looks up at his averted face. He remains silent. She continues apprehensively*) You don't say anything. I thought—you'd be glad. You've always told me it was the honorable thing to do.

MURRAY. (*gruffly*) I know. I say more than my prayers, damn it! (*With sudden eagerness*) Have you mailed the letter yet?

EILEEN. Yes. Why?

MURRAY. (*shortly*) Humph. Oh—nothing.

EILEEN. (*with pained disappointment*) Oh, Stephen, you don't think I did wrong, do you—now—after all you've said?

MURRAY. (*hurriedly*) Wrong? No, not if you were convinced it was the right thing to do yourself—if you know you don't love him. But I'd hate to think you did it just on my say-so. I shouldn't—— I didn't mean to interfere. I don't know enough about your relations for my opinion to count.

EILEEN. (*hurt*) You know all there is to know.

MURRAY. I know you've been frank. But him—I don't know

him. He may be quite different from my idea. That's what I'm getting at. I don't want to be unfair to him.

EILEEN. (*bitterly scornful*) You needn't worry. You weren't unfair. And you needn't be afraid you were responsible for my writing. I'd been going to for a long time before you ever spoke.

MURRAY. (*with a relieved sigh*) I'm glad of that—honestly, Eileen. I felt guilty. I shouldn't have knocked him behind his back without knowing him at all.

EILEEN. You said you could read him like a book from his letters I showed you.

MURRAY. (*apologetically*) I know. I'm a fool.

EILEEN. (*angrily*) What makes you so considerate of Fred Nicholls all of a sudden? What you thought about him was right.

MURRAY. (*vaguely*) I don't know. One makes mistakes.

EILEEN. (*assertively*) Well, I know! You needn't waste pity on him. He'll be only too glad to get my letter. He's been anxious to be free of me ever since I was sent here, only he thought it wouldn't be decent to break it off himself while I was sick. He was afraid of what people would say about him when they found it out. So he's just gradually stopped writing and coming for visits, and waited for me to realize. And if I didn't, I know he'd have broken it off himself the first day I got home. I've kept persuading myself that, in spite of the way he's acted, he did love me as much as he could love anyone, and that it would hurt him if I—— But now I know that he never loved me, that he couldn't love anyone but himself. Oh, I don't hate him for it. He can't help being what he is. And all people seem to be—like that, mostly. I'm only going

to remember that he and I grew up together, and that he was kind to me then when he thought he liked me—and forget all the rest. (*With agitated impatience*) Oh, Stephen, you know all this I've said about him. Why don't you admit it? You've read his letters.

MURRAY. (*haltingly*) Yes, I'll admit that was my opinion—only I wanted to be sure you'd found out for yourself.

EILEEN. (*defiantly*) Well, I have! You see that now, don't you?

MURRAY. Yes; and I'm glad you're free of him, for your own sake. I knew he wasn't the person. (*With an attempt at a joking tone*) You must get one of the right sort—next time.

EILEEN. (*springing to her feet with a cry of pain*) Stephen! (*He avoids her eyes which search his face pleadingly*).

MURRAY. (*mumbling*) He wasn't good enough—to lace your shoes—nor anyone else, either.

EILEEN. (*with a nervous laugh*) Don't be silly. (*After a pause during which she waits hungrily for some words from him—with a sigh of despair—faintly*) Well, I've told you—all there is. I might as well go back.

MURRAY. (*not looking at her—indistinctly*) Yes. You mustn't lose too much sleep. I'll come to your cottage in the morning to say good-by. They'll permit that, I guess.

EILEEN. (*stands looking at him imploringly, her face convulsed with anguish, but he keeps his eyes fixed on the rocks at his feet. Finally she seems to give up and takes a few uncertain steps up the road toward the right—in an exhausted whisper*) Good night, Stephen.

MURRAY. (*his voice choked and husky*) Good night, Eileen.

EILEEN. (*walks weakly up the road but, as she passes the signpost, she suddenly stops and turns to look again at* MURRAY *who has not moved or lifted his eyes. A great shuddering sob shatters her pent-up emotions. She runs back to* MURRAY, *her arms outstretched, with a choking cry*) Stephen!

MURRAY. (*startled, whirls to face her and finds her arms thrown around his neck—in a terrified tone*) Eileen!

EILEEN. (*brokenly*) I love you, Stephen—you! That's what I wanted to tell! (*She gazes up into his eyes, her face transfigured by the joy and pain of this abject confession*).

MURRAY. (*wincing as if this were the thing he had feared to hear*) Eileen!

EILEEN. (*pulling down his head with fierce strength and kissing him passionately on the lips*) I love you! I will say it! There! (*With sudden horror*) Oh, I know I shouldn't kiss you! I mustn't! You're all well—and I——

MURRAY. (*protesting frenziedly*) Eileen! Damn it! Don't say that! What do you think I am! (*He kisses her fiercely two or three times until she forces a hand over her mouth*).

EILEEN. (*with a hysterically happy laugh*) No! Just hold me in your arms—just a little while—before——

MURRAY. (*his voice trembling*) Eileen! Don't talk that way! You're——it's killing me. I can't stand it!

EILEEN. (*with soothing tenderness*) Listen, dear—listen—and you won't say a word—— I've so much to say—till I get through—please, will you promise?

MURRAY. (*between clinched teeth*) Yes—anything, Eileen!

EILEEN. Then I want to say—I know your secret. You don't love me—— Isn't that it? (MURRAY *groans*) Ssshh! It's all right, dear. You can't help what you don't feel. I've

guessed you didn't—right along. And I've loved you—such a long time now—always, it seems. And you've sort of guessed—that I did—didn't you? No, don't speak! I am sure you've guessed—only you didn't want to know—that—did you? —when you didn't love me. That's why you were lying—but I saw, I knew! Oh, I'm not blaming you, darling. How could I—never! You mustn't look so—so frightened. I know how you felt, dear. I've—I've watched you. It was just a flirtation for you at first. Wasn't it? Oh, I know. It was just fun, and—— Please don't look at me so. I'm not hurting you, am I? I wouldn't for worlds, dear—you know—hurt you! And then afterwards—you found we could be such good friends —helping each other—and you wanted it to stay just like that always, didn't you?—I know—and then I had to spoil it all—and fall in love with you—didn't I? Oh, it was stupid— I shouldn't—I couldn't help it, you were so kind and—and different—and I wanted to share in your work and—and everything. I knew you wouldn't want to know I loved you—when you didn't—and I tried hard to be fair and hide my love so you wouldn't see—and I did, didn't I, dear? You never knew till just lately—maybe not till just today—did you?—when I knew you were going away so soon—and couldn't help showing it. You never knew before, did you? Did you?

MURRAY. (*miserably*) No. Oh, Eileen—Eileen, I'm so sorry!

EILEEN. (*in heart-broken protest*) Sorry? Oh no, Stephen, you mustn't be! It's been beautiful—all of it—for me! That's what makes your going— so hard. I had to see you tonight—I'd have gone—crazy—if I didn't know you knew, if I hadn't made you guess. And I thought—if you knew about my writing

to Fred—that—maybe—it'd make some difference. (MURRAY *groans—and she laughs hysterically*) I must have been crazy —to think that—mustn't I? As if that could—when you don't love me. Sshh! Please! Let me finish. You mustn't feel sad—or anything. It's made me happier than I've ever been —loving you—even when I did know—you didn't. Only now —you'll forgive me telling you all this, won't you, dear? Now, it's so terrible to think I won't see you any more. I'll feel so —without anybody.

MURRAY. (*brokenly*) But I'll—come back. And you'll be out soon—and then——

EILEEN. (*brokenly*) Sshh! Let me finish. You don't know how alone I am now. Father—he'll marry that housekeeper—and the children—they've forgotten me. None of them need me any more. They've found out how to get on without me —and I'm a drag—dead to them—no place for me home any more—and they'll be afraid to have me back—afraid of catching—I know she won't want me back. And Fred—he's gone—he never mattered, anyway. Forgive me, dear—worrying you —only I want you to know how much you've meant to me—so you won't forget—ever—after you've gone.

MURRAY. (*in grief-stricken tones*) Forget? Eileen! I'll do anything in God's world——

EILEEN. I know—you like me a lot even if you can't love me —don't you? (*His arms tighten about her as he bends down and forces a kiss on her lips again*) Oh, Stephen! That was for good-by. You mustn't come tomorrow morning. I couldn't bear having you—with people watching. But you'll write after —often—won't you? (*Heartbrokenly*) Oh, please do that, Stephen!

MURRAY. I will! I swear! And when you get out I'll—we'll—I'll find something— (*He kisses her again*).

EILEEN. (*breaking away from him with a quick movement and stepping back a few feet*) Good-by, darling. Remember me—and perhaps—you'll find out after a time—I'll pray God to make it so! Oh, what am I saying? Only—I'll hope—I'll hope—till I die!

MURRAY. (*in anguish*) Eileen!

EILEEN. (*her breath coming in tremulous heaves of her bosom*) Remember, Stephen—if ever you want—I'll do anything—anything you want—no matter what—I don't care—there's just you and—don't hate me, dear. I love you—love you—remember! (*She suddenly turns and runs away up the road*).

MURRAY. Eileen! (*He starts to run after her but stops by the signpost and stamps on the ground furiously, his fists clenched in impotent rage at himself and at Fate.*) Christ!

(*The Curtain Falls*)

THE STRAW

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

SCENE. *Four months later. An isolation room at the Infirmary with a sleeping porch at the right of it. Late afternoon of a Sunday toward the end of October. The room, extending two-thirds of the distance from left to right, is, for reasons of space economy, scantily furnished with the bare necessities—a bureau with mirror in the left corner, rear—two straight-backed chairs—a table with a glass top in the center. The floor is varnished hardwood. The walls and furniture are painted white. On the left, forward, a door to the hallway. On the right, rear, a double glass door opening on the porch. Farther front two windows. The porch, a screened-in continuation of the room, contains only a single iron bed painted white, and a small table placed beside the bed.*

The woods, the leaves of the trees rich in their autumn coloring, rise close about this side of the Infirmary. Their branches almost touch the porch on the right. In the rear of the porch they have been cleared away from the building for a narrow space, and through this opening the distant hills can be seen with the tree tops glowing in the sunlight.

As the curtain rises, EILEEN *is discovered lying in the bed on the porch, propped up into a half-sitting position by pillows under her back and head. She seems to have grown much thinner. Her face is pale and drawn with deep hollows under her cheek-bones. Her eyes are dull and lusterless. She gazes straight before her into the wood with the unseeing stare*

of apathetic indifference. The door from the hall in the room behind her is opened and MISS HOWARD *enters followed by* BILL CARMODY, MRS. BRENNAN, *and* MARY. CARMODY'S *manner is unwontedly sober and subdued. This air of respectable sobriety is further enhanced by a black suit, glaringly new and stiffly pressed, a new black derby hat, and shoes polished like a mirror. His expression is full of a bitter, if suppressed, resentment. His gentility is evidently forced upon him in spite of himself and correspondingly irksome.* MRS. BRENNAN *is a tall, stout woman of fifty, lusty and loud-voiced, with a broad, snub-nosed, florid face, a large mouth, the upper lip darkened by a suggestion of mustache, and little round blue eyes, hard and restless with a continual fuming irritation. She is got up regardless in her ridiculous Sunday-best.* MARY *appears tall and skinny-legged in a starched, outgrown frock. The sweetness of her face has disappeared, giving way to a hangdog sullenness, a stubborn silence, with sulky, furtive glances of rebellion directed at her stepmother.*

MISS HOWARD. (*pointing to the porch*) She's out there on the porch.

MRS. BRENNAN. (*with dignity*) Thank you, ma'am

MISS HOWARD. (*with a searching glance at the visitors as if to appraise their intentions*) Eileen's been very sick lately, you know, so be careful not to worry her about anything. Do your best to cheer her up.

CARMODY. (*mournfully*) We'll try to put life in her spirits, God help her. (*With an uncertain look at* MRS. BRENNAN) Won't we, Maggie?

MRS. BRENNAN. (*turning sharply on* MARY *who has gone over to examine the things on the bureau*) Come away from

that, Mary. Curiosity killed a cat. Don't be touchin' her things. Remember what I told you. Or is it admirin' your mug in the mirror you are? (*Turning to* MISS HOWARD *as* MARY *moves away from the bureau, hanging her head—shortly*) Don't you worry, ma'am. We won't trouble Eileen at all.

MISS HOWARD. Another thing. You mustn't say anything to her of what Miss Gilpin just told you about her being sent away to the State Farm in a few days. Eileen isn't to know till the very last minute. It would only disturb her.

CARMODY (*hastily*) We'll not say a word of it.

MISS HOWARD. (*turning to the hall door*) Thank you. (*She goes out, shutting the door*).

MRS. BRENNAN. (*angrily*) She has a lot of impudent gab, that one, with her don't do this and don't do that! (*Gazing about the room critically*) Two sticks of chairs and a table! They don't give much for the money.

CARMODY. Catch them! It's a good thing she's clearin' out of this and her worse off after them curin' her eight months than she was when she came. She'll maybe get well in the new place.

MRS. BRENNAN. (*indifferently*) It's God will, what'll happen. (*Irritably*) And I'm thinkin' it's His punishment she's under now for having no heart in her and never writin' home a word to you or the children in two months or more. If the doctor hadn't wrote us himself to come see her, we'd have been no wiser.

CARMODY. Whisht. Don't be blamin' a sick girl.

MARY. (*who has drifted to one of the windows at right—curiously*) There's somebody in bed out there. Is it Eileen?

MRS. BRENNAN. Don't be goin' out there till I tell you, you

imp! (*Coming closer to him and lowering her voice*) Are you going to tell her about it?

CARMODY. (*pretending ignorance*) About what?

MRS. BRENNAN. About what, indeed! About our marryin' two weeks back, of course. What else?

CARMODY. (*uncertainly*) Yes—I disremembered she didn't know. I'll have to tell her, surely.

MRS. BRENNAN. (*flaring up*) You speak like you wouldn't. Are you afraid of a slip of a girl? Well, then, I'm not! I'll tell her to her face soon enough.

CARMODY. (*angry in his turn—assertively*) You'll not, now! Keep your mouth out of this and your rough tongue! I tell you I'll tell her.

MRS. BRENNAN. (*satisfied*) Let's be going out to her, then. (*They move toward the door to the porch*) And keep your eye on your watch. We mustn't miss the train. Come with us, Mary, and remember to keep your mouth shut. (*They go out on the porch and stand just outside the door waiting for* EILEEN *to notice them; but the girl in bed continues to stare into the woods, oblivious to their presence*).

MRS. BRENNAN. (*nudging* CARMODY *with her elbow—in a harsh whisper*) Glory be, it's bad she's lookin'. The look on her face'd frighten you. Speak to her, you! (EILEEN *stirs uneasily as if this whisper had disturbed her unconsciously*).

CARMODY. (*wetting his lips and clearing his throat huskily*) Eileen.

EILEEN. (*startled, turns and stares at them with frightened eyes. After a pause she ventures uncertainly as if she were not sure but what these figures might be creatures of her dream*)

Father. (*Her eyes shift to* MRS. BRENNAN'S *face and she shudders*) Mrs. Brennan.

MRS. BRENNAN. (*quickly—in a voice meant to be kindly*) Here we are, all of us, come to see you. How is it you're feelin' now, Eileen? (*While she is talking she advances to the bedside, followed by* CARMODY, *and takes one of the sick girl's hands in hers.* EILEEN *withdraws it as if stung and holds it out to her father.* MRS. BRENNAN'S *face flushes angrily and she draws back from the bedside*).

CARMODY. (*moved—with rough tenderness patting her hand*) Ah, Eileen, sure it's a sight for sore eyes to see you again! (*He bends down as if to kiss her, but, struck by a sudden fear, hesitates, straightens himself, and shamed by the understanding in* EILEEN'S *eyes, grows red and stammers confusedly*) How are you now? Sure it's the picture of health you're lookin'. (EILEEN *sighs and turns her eyes away from his with a resigned sadness*).

MRS. BRENNAN. What are you standin' there for like a stick, Mary? Haven't you a word to say to your sister?

EILEEN. (*twisting her head around and seeing* MARY *for the first time—with a glad cry*) Mary! I—why I didn't see you before! Come here. (MARY *approaches gingerly with apprehensive side glances at* MRS. BRENNAN *who watches her grimly.* EILEEN'S *arms reach out for her hungrily. She grasps her about the waist and seems trying to press the unwilling child to her breast*).

MARY. (*fidgeting nervously—suddenly in a frightened whine*) Let me go! (EILEEN *releases her, looks at her face dazedly for a second, then falls back limply with a little moan and shuts her eyes.* MARY, *who has stepped back a pace, remains*

fixed there as if fascinated with fright by her sister's face. She stammers) Eileen—you look so—so funny.

EILEEN. (*without opening her eyes—in a dead voice*) You, too! I never thought you— Go away, please.

MRS. BRENNAN. (*with satisfaction*) Come here to me, Mary, and don't be botherin' your sister. (MARY *avoids her stepmother but retreats to the far end of the porch where she stands shrunk back against the wall, her eyes fixed on* EILEEN *with the same fascinated horror*).

CARMODY. (*after an uncomfortable pause, forcing himself to speak*) Is the pain bad, Eileen?

EILEEN. (*dully—without opening her eyes*) There's no pain. (*There is another pause—then she murmurs indifferently*) There are chairs in the room you can bring out if you want to sit down.

MRS. BRENNAN. (*sharply*) We've not time to be sittin'. We've the train back to catch.

EILEEN. (*in the same lifeless voice*) It's a disagreeable trip. I'm sorry you had to come.

CARMODY. (*fighting against an oppression he cannot understand, bursts into a flood of words*) Don't be talking of the trip. Sure we're glad to take it to get a sight of you. It's three months since I've had a look at you and I was anxious. Why haven't you written a line to us? You could do that without trouble, surely. Don't you ever think of us at all any more? (*He waits for an answer but* EILEEN *remains silent with her eyes closed.* CARMODY *starts to walk up and down talking with an air of desperation*) You're not asking a bit of news from home. I'm thinkin' the people out here have taken all the thought of us out of your head. We're all well, thank God.

I've another good job on the streets from Murphy and one that'll last a long time, praise be! I'm needin' it surely, with all the expenses—but no matter. Billy had a raise from his old skinflint of a boss a month back. He's gettin' seven a week now and proud as a turkey. He was comin' out with us today but he'd a date with his girl. Sure, he's got a girl now, the young bucko! What d'you think of him? It's old Malloy's girl he's after—the pop-eyed one with glasses, you remember—as ugly as a blind sheep, only he don't think so. He said to give you his love. (EILEEN *stirs and sighs wearily, a frown appearing for an instant on her forehead*) And Tom and Nora was comin' out too, but Father Fitz had some doin's or other up to the school, and he told them to be there, so they wouldn't come with us, but they sent their love to you too. They're growin' so big you'd not know them. Tom's no good at the school. He's like Billy was. I've had to take the strap to him often. He's always playin' hooky and roamin' the streets. And Nora —(*with pride*) There's the divil for you! Up to everything she is and no holdin' her high spirits. As pretty as a picture, and the smartest girl in her school, Father Fitz says. Am I lyin', Maggie?

MRS. BRENNAN. (*grudgingly*) She's smart enough—and too free with her smartness.

CARMODY. (*pleased*) Ah, don't be talkin! She'll know more than the lot of us before she's grown even. (*He pauses in his walk and stares down at* EILEEN, *frowning*) Are you sick, Eileen, that you're keepin' your eyes shut without a word out of you?

EILEEN. (*wearily*) No. I'm tired, that's all.

CARMODY. (*resuming his walk*) And who else is there, let

me think? Oh, Mary—she's the same as ever, you can see for yourself.

EILEEN. (*bitterly*) The same? Oh, no!

CARMODY. She's grown, you mean? I suppose. You'd notice, not seeing her so long? (*He can think of nothing else to say but walks up and down with a restless, uneasy expression*).

MRS. BRENNAN. (*sharply*) What time is it gettin'?

CARMODY. (*fumbles for his watch*) Half past four, a bit after.

MRS. BRENNAN. We'll have to leave soon. It's a long jaunt down the hill in that buggy. (*She catches his eye and makes violent signs to him to tell* EILEEN *what he has come to tell*).

CARMODY. (*after an uncertain pause—clenching his fists and clearing his throat*) Eileen.

EILEEN. Yes.

CARMODY. (*irritably*) Can't you open your eyes on me? It's like talkin' to myself I am.

EILEEN. (*looking at him—dully*) What is it?

CARMODY. (*stammering—avoiding her glance*) It's this, Eileen—me and Maggie—Mrs. Brennan, that is—we——

EILEEN. (*without surprise*) You're going to marry her?

CARMODY. (*with an effort*) Not goin' to. It's done.

EILEEN. (*without a trace of feeling*) Oh, so you've been married already? (*Without further comment, she closes her eyes*).

CARMODY. Two weeks back we were, by Father Fitz. (*He stands staring down at his daughter, irritated, perplexed and confounded by her silence, looking as if he longed to shake her*).

MRS. BRENNAN. (*angry at the lack of enthusiasm shown by*

EILEEN) Let us get out of this, Bill. It's little she's caring about you, and little thanks she has for all you've done for her and the money you've spent.

CARMODY. (*with a note of pleading*) Is that a proper way to be treatin' your father, Eileen, after what I've told you? Is it nothin' to you you've a good, kind woman now for mother?

EILEEN. (*fiercely, her eyes flashing open on him*) No, No! Never!

MRS. BRENNAN. (*plucking at* CARMODY'S *elbow. He stands looking at* EILEEN *helplessly, his mouth open, a guilty flush spreading over his face*) Come out of here, you big fool, you! Is it to listen to insults to your livin' wife you're waiting?

CARMODY. (*turning on her threateningly*) Will you shut your gab?

EILEEN. (*with a moan*) Oh, go away. Father! Please! Take her away!

MRS. BRENNAN. (*pulling at his arm*) Take me away this second or I'll never speak again to you till the day I die!

CARMODY. (*pushes her violently away from him—raging, his fist uplifted*) Shut your gab, I'm saying!

MRS. BRENNAN. The devil mend you and yours then! I'm leavin' you. (*She starts for the door*).

CARMODY. (*hastily*) Wait a bit, Maggie. I'm coming. (*She goes into the room, slamming the door, but once inside she stands still, trying to listen.* CARMODY *glares down at his daughter's pale twitching face with closed eyes. Finally he croaks in a whining tone of fear*) Is your last word a cruel one to me this day, Eileen? (*She remains silent. His face darkens. He turns and strides out of the door.* MARY *darts after him with a*

frightened cry of "Papa." EILEEN *covers her face with her hands and a shudder of relief runs over her body).*

MRS. BRENNAN. (*as* CARMODY *enters the room—in a mollified tone*) So you've come, have you? Let's go, then! (CARMODY *stands looking at her in silence, his expression full of gloomy rage. She bursts out impatiently*) Are you comin' or are you goin' back to her? (*She grabs* MARY'S *arm and pushes her toward the door to the hall*) Are you comin' or not, I'm asking?

CARMODY. (*somberly—as if to himself*) There's something wrong in the whole of this—that I can't make out. (*With sudden fury he brandishes his fists as though defying someone and growls threateningly*) And I'll get drunk this night—dead, rotten drunk! (*He seems to detect disapproval in* MRS. BRENNAN'S *face for she shakes his fist at her and repeats like a solemn oath*) I'll get drunk if my soul roasts for it—and no one in the whole world is strong enough to stop me! (MRS. BRENNAN *turns from him with a disgusted shrug of her shoulders and hustles* MARY *out of the door.* CARMODY, *after a second's pause, follows them.* EILEEN *lies still, looking out into the woods with empty, desolate eyes.* MISS HOWARD *comes into the room from the hall and goes to the porch, carrying a glass of milk in her hand).*

MISS HOWARD. Here's your diet, Eileen. I forgot it until just now. Did you have a nice visit with your folks?

EILEEN. (*forcing a smile*) Yes.

MISS HOWARD. I hope they didn't worry you over home affairs?

EILEEN. No. (*She sips her milk and sets it back on the table with a shudder of disgust*).

MISS HOWARD. (*with a smile*) What a face! You'd think you were taking poison.

EILEEN. (*with deep passion*) I wish it was poison!

MISS HOWARD. (*jokingly*) Oh, come now! That isn't a nice way to feel on the Sabbath. (*With a meaning smile*) I've some news that'll cheer you up, I bet. (*archly*) Guess who's here on a visit?

EILEEN. (*startled—in a frightened whisper*) Who?

MISS HOWARD. Mr. Murray. (EILEEN *closes her eyes wincingly for a moment and a shadow of pain comes over her face*) He came just about the time your folks did. I saw him for a moment, not to speak to. (*Beaming—with a certain curiosity*) What do you think of that for news?

EILEEN. (*trying to conceal her agitation and assume a casual tone*) He must have come to be examined.

MISS HOWARD. (*with a meaning laugh*) Oh, I'd hardly say that was his main reason. (*In business-like tones*) Well, I've got to get back on the job. (*She turns to the door calling back jokingly*) He'll be in to see you of course, so look your prettiest. (*She goes out and shuts the door to the porch.* EILEEN *gives a frightened gasp and struggles up in bed as if she wanted to call the nurse to return. Then she lies back in a state of great nervous excitement, twisting her head with eager, fearful glances toward the door, listening, clasping and unclasping her thin fingers on the white spread. As* MISS HOWARD *walks across the room to the hall door, it is opened and* STEPHEN MURRAY *enters. A great change is visible in his face. It is much thinner and the former healthy tan has faded to a sallow pallor. Puffy shadows of sleeplessness and dissipation are marked under his heavy-lidded eyes. He is dressed in a well-fitting, expensive,*

dark suit, a white shirt with a soft collar and bright-colored tie).

MISS HOWARD. (*with pleased surprise, holding out her hand*) Hello, Mr. Murray.

MURRAY. (*shaking her hand—with a forced pleasantness*) How are you, Miss Howard?

MISS HOWARD. Fine as ever. It certainly looks natural to see you around here again—not that I hope you're here to stay, though. (*With a smile*) I suppose you're on your way to Eileen now. Well, I won't keep you. I've oodles of work to do. (*She opens the hall door. He starts for the porch*) Oh, I was forgetting—Congratulations! I've read those stories—all of us have. They're great. We're all so proud of you. You're one of our graduates, you know.

MURRAY. (*indifferently*) Oh,—that stuff.

MISS HOWARD. (*gayly*) Don't be so modest. Well, see you later, I hope.

MURRAY. Yes. Doctor Stanton invited me to stay for supper and I may——

MISS HOWARD. Fine! Be sure to! (*She goes out.* MURRAY *walks to porch door and steps out. He finds* EILEEN'S *eyes waiting for him. As their eyes meet she gasps involuntarily and he stops short in his tracks. For a moment they remain looking at each other in silence*).

EILEEN. (*dropping her eyes—faintly*) Stephen.

MURRAY. (*much moved, strides to her bedside and takes her hands awkwardly*) Eileen. (*Then after a second's pause in which he searches her face and is shocked by the change illness has made—anxiously*) How are you feeling, Eileen? (*He grows confused by her gaze and his eyes shift from hers, which search his face with wild yearning*).

EILEEN. (*forcing a smile*) Oh, I'm all right. (*Eagerly*) But you, Stephen? How are you? (*Excitedly*) Oh, it's good to see you again! (*Her eyes continue fixed on his face pleadingly, questioningly*).

MURRAY. (*haltingly*) And it's sure great to see you again, Eileen. (*He releases her hand and turns away*) And I'm fine and dandy. I look a little done up, I guess, but that's only the result of too much New York.

EILEEN. (*sensing from his manner that whatever she has hoped for from his visit is not to be, sinks back on the pillows, shutting her eyes hopelessly, and cannot control a sigh of pain*).

MURRAY. (*turning to her anxiously*) What's the matter, Eileen? You're not in pain, are you?

EILEEN. (*wearily*) No.

MURRAY. You haven't been feeling badly lately, have you? Your letters suddenly stopped—not a line for the past three weeks—and I——

EILEEN. (*bitterly*) I got tired of writing and never getting any answer, Stephen.

MURRAY. (*shame-faced*) Come, Eileen, it wasn't as bad as that. You'd think I never—and I did write, didn't I?

EILEEN. Right after you left here, you did, Stephen. Lately——

MURRAY. I'm sorry, Eileen. It wasn't that I didn't mean to —but—in New York it's so hard. You start to do one thing and something else interrupts you. You never seem to get any one thing done when it ought to be. You can understand that, can't you, Eileen?

EILEEN. (*sadly*) Yes. I understand everything now.

MURRAY. (*offended*) What do you mean by everything?

You said that so strangely. You mean you don't believe—(*But she remains silent with her eyes shut. He frowns and takes to pacing up and down beside the bed*) Why have they got you stuck out here on this isolation porch, Eileen?

EILEEN. (*dully*) There was no room on the main porch, I suppose.

MURRAY. You never mentioned in any of your letters——

EILEEN. It's not very cheerful to get letters full of sickness. I wouldn't like to, I know.

MURRAY. (*hurt*) That isn't fair, Eileen. You know I—— How long have you been back in the Infirmary?

EILEEN. About a month.

MURRAY. (*shocked*) A month! But you were up and about —on exercise, weren't you—before that?

EILEEN. No. I had to stay in bed while I was at the cottage.

MURRAY. You mean—ever since that time they sent you back —the day before I left?

EILEEN. Yes.

MURRAY. But I thought from the cheery tone of your letters that you were——

EILEEN. (*uneasily*) Getting better? I am, Stephen. I'm strong enough to be up now but Doctor Stanton wants me to take a good long rest this time so that when I get up again I'll be sure—— (*She breaks off impatiently*) But don't let's talk about it. I'm all right. (MURRAY *glances down at her face worriedly. She changes the subject*) You've been over to see Doctor Stanton, haven't you?

MURRAY. Yes.

EILEEN. Did he examine you?

MURRAY. Yes. (*Carelessly*) Oh, he found me O. K.

EILEEN. I'm glad, Stephen. (*After a pause*) Tell about yourself—what you've been doing. You've written a lot lately, haven't you?

MURRAY. (*frowning*) No. I haven't been able to get down to it—somehow. There's so little time to yourself once you get to know people in New York. The sale of the stories you typed put me on easy street as far as money goes, so I've felt no need—— (*He laughs weakly*) I guess I'm one of those who have to get down to hard pan before they get the kick to drive them to hard work.

EILEEN. (*surprised*) Was it hard work writing them up here? You used to seem so happy just in doing them.

MURRAY. I was—happier than I've been before or afterward. (*Cynically*) But—I don't know—it was a new game to me then and I was chuck full of illusions about the glory of it. (*He laughs half-heartedly*) Now I'm hardly a bit more enthusiastic over it than I used to be over newspaper work. It's like everything else, I guess. When you've got it, you find you don't want it.

EILEEN. (*looking at him wonderingly—disturbed*) But isn't just the writing itself worth while?

MURRAY. (*as if suddenly ashamed of himself—quickly*) Yes. Of course it is. I'm talking like a fool. I'm sore at everything because I'm dissatisfied with my own cussedness and laziness —and I want to pass the buck. (*With a smile of cheerful confidence*) It's only a fit. I'll come out of it all right and get down to brass tacks again.

EILEEN. (*with an encouraging smile*) That's the way you ought to feel. It'd be wrong—I've read the two stories that have come out so far over and over. They're fine, I think. Every line in them sounds like you, and at the same time sounds

natural and like people and things you see every day. Everybody thinks they're fine, Stephen.

MURRAY. (*pleased but pretending cynicism*) Then they must be rotten. (*Then with self-assurance*) Well, I've plenty more of those stories in my head. (*Spiritedly*) And I'll make them so much better than what I've done so far, you won't recognize them. (*Smiling*) Darn it, do you know just talking about it makes me feel as if I could sit right down now and start in on one. Is it the fact I've worked here before—or is it seeing you, Eileen? (*Gratefully*) I really believe it's you. I haven't forgotten how you helped me before.

EILEEN. (*in a tone of pain*) Don't, Stephen. I didn't do anything.

MURRAY. (*eagerly*) Yes, you did. You made it possible. And since I've left the San, I've looked forward to your letters to boost up my spirits. When I felt down in the mouth over my own idiocy, I used to reread them, and they always were good medicine. I can't tell you how grateful I've felt, honestly!

EILEEN. (*faintly*) You're kind to say so, Stephen—but it was nothing, really.

MURRAY. And I can't tell you how I've missed those letters for the past three weeks. They left a big hole in things. I was worried about you—not having heard a word. (*With a smile*) So I came to look you up.

EILEEN. (*faintly. Forcing an answering smile*) Well, you see now I'm all right.

MURRAY. (*concealing his doubt*) Yes, of course you are. Only I'd a darn sight rather see you up and about. We could take a walk, then—through the woods. (*A wince of pain shadows* EILEEN'S *face. She closes her eyes.* MURRAY *continues softly, after a pause*) You haven't forgotten that last night—out there—Eileen?

EILEEN. (*her lips trembling—trying to force a laugh*) Please Please don't remind me of that, Stephen. I was so silly and so sick, too. My temp was so high it must have made me—completely crazy—or I'd never dreamed of doing such a stupid thing. My head must have been full of wheels because I don't remember anything I did or said, hardly.

MURRAY. (*his pride taken down a peg by this—in a hurt tone*) Oh! Well—I haven't forgotten and I never will, Eileen. (*Then his face clears up as if a weight had been taken off his conscience*) Well—I rather thought you wouldn't take it seriously—afterward. You were all up in the air that night. And you never mentioned it in your letters——

EILEEN. (*pleadingly*) Don't talk about it! Forget it ever happened. It makes me feel—(*with a half-hysterical laugh*)—like a fool!

MURRAY. (*worried*) All right, Eileen. I won't. Don't get worked up over nothing. That isn't resting, you know. (*Looking down at her closed eyes—solicitously*) Perhaps all my talking has tired you out? Do you feel done up? Why don't you try and take a nap now?

EILEEN. (*dully*) Yes, I'd like to sleep.

MURRAY. (*clasps her hands gently*) I'll leave you then. I'll drop back to say good-by and stay awhile before I go. I won't leave until the last train. (*As she doesn't answer*) Do you hear, Eileen?

EILEEN. (*weakly*) Yes. You'll come back—to say good-by.

MURRAY. Yes. I'll be back sure. (*He presses her hand and after a kindly glance of sympathy down at her face, tiptoes to the door and goes into the room, shutting the door behind him. When she hears the door shut* EILEEN *struggles up in bed and stretches her arms after him with an agonized sob "Stephen!" She hides her face in her hands and sobs brokenly.* MURRAY

walks across to the hall door and is about to go out when the door is opened and MISS GILPIN *enters*).

MISS GILPIN. (*hurriedly*) How do you do, Mr. Murray. Doctor Stanton just told me you were here.

MURRAY. (*as they shake hands—smiling*) How are you, Miss Gilpin?

MISS GILPIN. He said he'd examined you, and that you were O.K. I'm glad. (*Glancing at him keenly*) You've been talking to Eileen?

MURRAY. Just left her this second. She wanted to sleep for a while.

MISS GILPIN. (*wonderingly*) Sleep? (*Then hurriedly*) It's too bad. I wish I'd known you were here sooner. I wanted very much to talk to you before you saw Eileen. (*With a worried smile*) I still think I ought to have a talk with you.

MURRAY. Certainly, Miss Gilpin.

MISS GILPIN. (*takes a chair and places it near the hall door*) Sit down. She can't hear us here. Goodness knows this is hardly the place for confidences, but there are visitors all over and it'll have to do. Did you close the door tightly? She mustn't hear me above all. (*She goes to the porch door and peeps out for a moment; then comes back to him with flashing eyes*) She's crying! What have you been saying to her? Oh, it's too late, I know! What has happened out there? Tell me!

MURRAY. (*stammering*) Nothing. She's crying? Why Miss Gilpin—you know I wouldn't hurt her for worlds.

MISS GILPIN. (*more calmly*) Intentionally, I know you wouldn't. But something has happened. (*Then briskly*) Since you don't seem inclined to confide in me, I'll have to in you. You noticed how badly she looks, didn't you?

MURRAY. Yes, I did.

MISS GILPIN. (*gravely*) She's been going down hill steadily

—(*meaningly*)—ever since you left. She's in a very serious state, let me impress you with that. Doctor Stanton has given up hope of her improving here, and her father is unwilling to pay for her elsewhere now he knows there's a cheaper place—the State Farm. So she's to be sent there in a day or so.

MURRAY. (*springing to his feet—horrified*) To the State Farm!

MISS GILPIN. Her time here is long past. You know the rule—and she isn't getting better.

MURRAY. (*appalled*) That means——!

MISS GILPIN. (*forcibly*) Death! That's what it means for her!

MURRAY. (*stunned*) Good God, I never dreamed——

MISS GILPIN. In her case, it's certain. She'll die. And it wouldn't do any good to keep her here, either. She'd die here. She'll die anywhere because lately she's given up hope, she hasn't wanted to live any more. She's let herself go—and now it's too late.

MURRAY. Too late? You mean there's no chance—now? (MISS GILPIN *nods.* MURRAY *is overwhelmed—after a pause—stammering*) Isn't there—anything—we can do?

MISS GILPIN—(*sadly*) I don't know. I should have talked to you before. You see, she's seen you now. She knows. (*As he looks mystified she continues slowly*) I suppose you know that Eileen loves you, don't you?

MURRAY. (*as if defending himself against an accusation—with confused alarm*) No—Miss Gilpin. She may have felt something like that—once—but that was long ago before I left the San. She's forgotten all about it since, I know she has. (MISS GILPIN *smiles bitterly*) Why—just now—she said that part of it had all been so silly she felt she'd acted like a fool and didn't ever want to be reminded of it.

MISS GILPIN. She saw that you didn't love her—any more than

you did in the days before you left. Oh, I used to watch you then. I sensed what was going on between you. I would have stopped it then out of pity for her, if I could have, if I didn't know that any interference would only make matters worse. (*She sighs—then after a pause*) You'll have to forgive me for speaking to you so boldly on a delicate subject. But, don't you see, it's for her sake. I love Eileen. We all do. (*Averting her eyes from his—in a low voice*) I know how Eileen feels, Mr. Murray. Once—a long time ago—I suffered as she is suffering —from the same mistake. But I had resources to fall back upon that Eileen hasn't got—a family who loved me and understood—friends—so I pulled through. But it spoiled my life for a long time. (*Looking at him again and forcing a smile*) So I feel that perhaps I have a right to speak for Eileen who has no one else.

MURRAY. (*huskily—much moved*) Say anything you like, Miss Gilpin.

MISS GILPIN. (*after a pause—sadly*) You don't love her—do you?

MURRAY. No—I—— I don't believe I've ever thought much of loving anyone—that way.

MISS GILPIN. (*sadly*) Oh, it's too late, I'm afraid. If we had only had this talk before you had seen her! I meant to talk to you frankly and if I found out you didn't love Eileen—there was always the forlorn hope that you might—I was going to tell you not to see her, for her sake—not to let her face the truth. For I'm sure she continued to hope in spite of everything, and always would—to the end—if she didn't see you. I was going to implore you to stay away, to write her letters that would encourage her hope, and in that way she'd never learn the truth. I thought of writing you all this—but—it's so delicate a matter—I didn't have the courage. (*With intense grief*) And now Doctor Stanton's decision to send her away makes everything doubly hard. When

she knows *that*—she'll throw everything that holds her to life—out of the window! And think of it—her dying there alone!

MURRAY. (*very pale*) Don't! That shan't happen. I have money enough—I'll make more—to send her any place you think——

MISS GILPIN. That's something—but it doesn't touch the source of her unhappiness. If there were only some way to make her happy in the little time that's left to her! She has suffered so much through you. Oh, Mr. Murray, can't you tell her you love her?

MURRAY. (*after a pause—slowly*) But she'll never believe me, I'm afraid, now.

MISS GILPIN. (*eagerly*) But you must make her believe! And you must ask her to marry you. If you're engaged it will give you the right in her eyes to take her away. You can take her to some private San. There's a small place but a very good one at White Lake. It's not too expensive, and it's a beautiful spot, out of the world, and you can live and work nearby. And she'll be happy to the very last. Don't you think that's something you can give in return for her love for you?

MURRAY. (*slowly—deeply moved*) Yes. (*Then determinedly*) But I won't go into this thing by halves. It isn't fair to her. I'm going to marry her—yes, I mean it. I owe her that if it will make her happy.

MISS GILPIN. (*with a sad smile*) She'll never consent—for your sake—until she's well again. And stop and think, Mr. Murray. Even if she did consent to marry you right now the shock—it'd be suicide for her. I'd have to warn her against it myself. I've talked with Dr. Stanton. God knows I'd be the first one to hold out hope if there was any. There isn't. It's merely a case of prolonging the short time left to her and making it happy. You must bear that in mind—as a fact!

MURRAY. (*dully*) All right. I'll remember. But it's hell to realize—— (*He turns suddenly toward the porch door*) I'll go out to her now while I feel—that—yes, I know I can make her believe me now.

MISS GILPIN. You'll tell me—later on?

MURRAY. Yes. (*He opens the door to the porch and goes out.* MISS GILPIN *stands for a moment looking after him worriedly. Then she sighs helplessly and goes out to the hall.* MURRAY *steps noiselessly out on the porch.* EILEEN *is lying motionless with her eyes closed.* MURRAY *stands looking at her, his face showing the emotional stress he is under, a great pitying tenderness in his eyes. Then he seems to come to a revealing decision on what is best to do for he tiptoes to the bedside and bending down with a quick movement, takes her in his arms, and kisses her*) Eileen!

EILEEN. (*startled at first, resists automatically for a moment*) Stephen! (*Then she succumbs and lies back in his arms with a happy sigh, putting both hands to the sides of his face and staring up at him adoringly*) Stephen, dear!

MURRAY. (*quickly questioning her before she can question him*) You were fibbing—about that night—weren't you? You do love me, don't you, Eileen?

EILEEN. (*breathlessly*) Yes—I—but you, Stephen—you don't love me. (*She makes a movement as if to escape from his embrace*).

MURRAY. (*genuinely moved—with tender reassurance*) Why do you suppose I came away up here if not to tell you I did? But they warned me—Miss Gilpin—that you were still weak and that I mustn't excite you in any way. And I—I didn't want—but I had to come back and tell you.

EILEEN. (*convinced—with a happy laugh*) And is that why you acted so strange—and cold? Aren't they silly to tell you

that! As if being happy could hurt me! Why, it's just that, just you I've needed!

MURRAY. (*his voice trembling*) And you'll marry me, Eileen?

EILEEN. (*a shadow of doubt crossing her face momentarily*) Are you sure—you want me, Stephen?

MURRAY. (*a lump in his throat—huskily*) Yes. I do want you, Eileen.

EILEEN. (*happily*) Then I will—after I'm well again, of course. (*She kisses him*).

MURRAY. (*chokingly*) That won't be long now, Eileen.

EILEEN. (*joyously*) No—not long—now that I'm happy for once in my life. I'll surprise you, Stephen, the way I'll pick up and grow fat and healthy. You won't know me in a month. How can you ever love such a skinny homely thing as I am now! (*With a laugh*) I couldn't if I was a man—love such a fright.

MURRAY. Ssshh!

EILEEN. (*confidently*) But you'll see now. I'll make myself get well. We won't have to wait long, dear. And can't you move up to the town near here where you can see me every day, and you can work and I can help you with your stories just as I used to—and I'll soon be strong enough to do your typing again. (*She laughs*) Listen to me—talking about helping you —as if they weren't all your own work, those blessed stories! —as if I had anything to do with it!

MURRAY. (*hoarsely*) You had! You did! They're yours. (*Trying to calm himself*) But you mustn't stay here, Eileen. You'll let me take you away, won't you?—to a better place—not far away—White Lake, it's called. There's a small private sanatorium there. Doctor Stanton says it's one of the best. And I'll live nearby—it's a beautiful spot—and see you every day.

EILEEN. (*in the seventh heaven*) And did you plan out all this for me beforehand, Stephen? (*He nods with averted eyes.*

She kisses his hair) You wonderful, kind dear! And it's a small place—this White Lake? Then we won't have so many people around to disturb us, will we? We'll be all to ourselves. And you ought to work so well up there. I know New York wasn't good for you—alone—without me. And I'll get well and strong so quick! And you say it's a beautiful place? (*Intensely*) Oh, Stephen, any place in the world would be beautiful to me—if you were with me! (*His face is hidden in the pillow beside her. She is suddenly startled by a muffled sob—anxiously*) Why—Stephen—you're—you're crying! (*The tears start to her own eyes*).

MURRAY. (*Raising his face which is this time alight with a passionate awakening—a revelation*) Oh, I do love you, Eileen! I do! I love you, love you!

EILEEN. (*thrilled by the depths of his present sincerity—but with a teasing laugh*) Why, you say that as if you'd just made the discovery, Stephen!

MURRAY. Oh, what does it matter, Eileen! Oh, what a blind selfish ass I've been! You are my life—everything! I love you, Eileen! I do! I do! And we'll be married—(*Suddenly his face grows frozen with horror as he remembers the doom. For the first time Death confronts him face to face as a menacing reality*).

EILEEN. (*terrified by the look in his eyes*) What is it, Stephen? What——?

MURRAY. (*with a groan—protesting half-aloud in a strangled voice*) No! No! It can't be——! My God! (*He clutches her hands and hides his face in them*).

EILEEN. (*with a cry*) Stephen! What is the matter? (*Her face suddenly betrays an awareness, an intuitive sense of the truth*) Oh—Stephen—— (*Then with a childish whimper of terror*) Oh, Stephen, I'm going to die! I'm going to die!

MURRAY. (*lifting his tortured face—wildly*) No!

EILEEN. (*her voice sinking to a dead whisper*) I'm going to die.

MURRAY. (*seizing her in his arms in a passionate frenzy and pressing his lips to hers*) No, Eileen, no, my love, no! What are you saying? What could have made you think it? You—die? Why, of course, we're all going to die—but— Good God! What damned nonsense! You're getting well—every day. Everyone—Miss Gilpin—Stanton—everyone told me that. I swear before God, Eileen, they did! You're still weak, that's all. They said—it won't be long. You mustn't think that—not now.

EILEEN. (*miserably—unconvinced*) But why did you look at me—that way—with that awful look in your eyes——? (*While she is speaking* MISS GILPIN *enters the room from the hallway. She appears worried, agitated. She hurries toward the porch but stops inside the doorway, arrested by* MURRAY'S *voice*).

MURRAY. (*takes* EILEEN *by the shoulders and forces her to look into his eyes*) I wasn't thinking about you then—— No, Eileen—not you. I didn't mean you—but me—yes, me! I couldn't tell you before. They'd warned me—not to excite you—and I knew that would—if you loved me.

EILEEN. (*staring at him with frightened amazement*) You mean you—— you're sick again?

MURRAY. (*desperately striving to convince her*) Yes. I saw Stanton. I lied to you before—about that. It's come back on me, Eileen—you see how I look—I've let myself go. I don't know how to live without you, don't you see? And you'll—marry me now—without waiting—and help me to get well—you and I together—and not mind their lies—what they say to prevent you? You'll do that, Eileen?

EILEEN. I'll do anything for you—— And I'd be so happy—— (*She breaks down*) But, Stephen, I'm so afraid. I'm all mixed up. Oh, Stephen, I don't know what to believe!

MISS GILPIN. (*who has been listening thunderstruck to* MURRAY'S *wild pleading, at last summons up the determination to interfere—steps out on the porch—in a tone of severe remonstrance*) Mr. Murray!

MURRAY. (*starts to his feet with wild, bewildered eyes—confusedly*) Oh—you—— (MISS GILPIN *cannot restrain an exclamation of dismay as she sees his face wrung by despair.* EILEEN *turns her head away with a little cry as if she would hide her face in the bedclothes. A sudden fierce resolution lights up* MURRAY'S *countenance—hoarsely*) You're just in time, Miss Gilpin! Eileen! Listen! You'll believe Miss Gilpin, won't you? She knows all about it. (EILEEN *turns her eyes questioningly on the bewildered nurse*).

MISS GILPIN. What——?

MURRAY. (*determinedly*) Doctor Stanton—he must have told you about me. Eileen doesn't believe me—when I tell her I got T. B. again. She thinks—I don't know what. I know you're not supposed to, but—can't you tell her——?

MISS GILPIN. (*stunned by being thus defiantly confronted—stammeringly*) Mr. Murray! I—I—how can you ask——

MURRAY. (*quickly*) She loves me—and I—I—love her! (*He holds her eyes and speaks with a passion of sincerity that compels belief*) I love her, do you hear?

MISS GILPIN. (*falteringly*) You—love—Eileen?

MURRAY. Yes! I do! (*Entreatingly*) So—tell her—won't you?

MISS GILPIN. (*swallowing hard, her eyes full of pity and sorrow fixed on* EILEEN) Yes—Eileen—— (*She turns away slowly toward the door*).

EILEEN. (*with a little cry of alarmed concern, stretches out* her hands to MURRAY *protectingly*) Poor Stephen—dear! (*He grasps her hands and kisses them*).

MISS GILPIN. (*in a low voice*) Mr. Murray. May I speak to you?

MURRAY. (*with a look of questioning defiance at her*) Certainly.

MISS GILPIN. (*turns to* EILEEN *with a forced smile*) I won't steal him away for more than a moment, Eileen. (EILEEN *smiles happily*)

MURRAY. (*follows* MISS GILPIN *into the room. She leads him to the far end of the room near the door to the hall, after shutting the porch door carefully behind him. He looks at her defiantly*) Well?

MISS GILPIN. (*in low, agitated tones*) What has happened? I feel as if I may have done a great wrong to myself—to you—to her—by that lie. And yet—something forced me.

MURRAY. (*moved*) It has saved her—us. Oh, how can I explain what happened? I suddenly saw—how beautiful and sweet and good she is—how I couldn't bear the thought of life without her—— That's all. (*Determinedly*) She must marry me at once and I'll take her away—the far West—any place Stanton thinks can help. And she can take care of me—as she thinks—and I know she'll grow well as I seem to grow well. Oh Miss Gilpin, don't you see? No half and half measures can help us—help her. (*Fiercely as if defying her*) But we'll win together. We can! We must! There are things doctors can't value—can't know the strength of! (*Exultantly*) You'll see! I'll make Eileen get well, I tell you! Happiness will cure! Love is stronger than—— (*He suddenly breaks down before the pitying negation she cannot keep from her eyes. He sinks on a chair, shoulders bowed, face hidden in his hands, with*

a groan of despair) Oh, why did you give me a hopeless hope?

MISS GILPIN. (*putting her hand on his shoulder—with tender compassion—sadly*) Isn't all life just that—when you think of it? (*Her face lighting up with a consoling revelation*) But there must be something back of it—some promise of fulfillment, —somehow—somewhere—in the spirit of hope itself.

MURRAY. (*dully*) What do words mean to me now? (*Then suddenly starting to his feet and flinging off her hand with disdainful strength—violently and almost insultingly*) What damned rot! I tell you we'll win! We must! All the verdicts of all the doctors—what do they matter? This is—beyond you! And we'll win in spite of you! (*Scornfully*) How dare you use the word hopeless—as if it were the last! Come now, confess, damn it! There's always hope, isn't there? What do you *know?* Can you say you *know* anything?

MISS GILPIN. (*taken aback by his violence for a moment, finally bursts into a laugh of helplessness which is close to tears*) I? I know nothing—absolutely nothing! God bless you both! (*She raises her handkerchief to her eyes and hurries out to the hallway without turning her head.* MURRAY *stands looking after her for a moment; then strides out to the porch*).

EILEEN. (*turning and greeting him with a shy smile of happiness as he comes and kneels by her bedside*) Stephen! (*He kisses her. She strokes his hair and continues in a tone of motherly, self-forgetting solicitude*) I'll have to look out for you, Stephen, won't I? From now on? And see that you rest so many hours a day—and drink your milk when I drink mine —and go to bed at nine sharp when I do—and obey everything I tell you—and——

(*The Curtain Falls*)

BEFORE BREAKFAST

A Play in One Act

(1916)

BEFORE BREAKFAST

SCENE. *A small room serving both as kitchen and dining room in a flat on Christopher Street, New York City. In the rear, to the right, a door leading to the outer hallway. On the left of the doorway, a sink, and a two-burner gas stove. Over the stove, and extending to the left wall, a wooden closet for dishes, etc. On the left, two windows looking out on a fire escape where several potted plants are dying of neglect. Before the windows, a table covered with oilcloth. Two cane-bottomed chairs are placed by the table. Another stands against the wall to the right of door in rear. In the right wall, rear, a doorway leading into a bedroom. Farther forward, different articles of a man's and a woman's clothing are hung on pegs. A clothes line is strung from the left corner, rear, to the right wall, forward.*

It is about eight-thirty in the morning of a fine, sunshiny day in the early fall.

Mrs. Rowland enters from the bedroom, yawning, her hands still busy putting the finishing touches on a slovenly toilet by sticking hairpins into her hair which is bunched up in a drab-colored mass on top of her round head. She is of medium height and inclined to a shapeless stoutness, accentuated by her formless blue dress, shabby and worn. Her face is characterless, with small regular features and eyes of a nondescript blue. There is a pinched expression about her eyes and nose and her weak, spiteful mouth. She is in her early twenties but looks much older.

She comes to the middle of the room and yawns, stretching her arms to their full length. Her drowsy eyes stare about the

room with the irritated look of one to whom a long sleep has not been a long rest. She goes wearily to the clothes hanging on the right and takes an apron from a hook. She ties it about her waist, giving vent to an exasperated "damn" when the knot fails to obey her clumsy fingers. Finally gets it tied and goes slowly to the gas stove and lights one burner. She fills the coffee pot at the sink and sets it over the flame. Then slumps down into a chair by the table and puts a hand over her forehead as if she were suffering from headache. Suddenly her face brightens as though she had remembered something, and she casts a quick glance at the dish closet; then looks sharply at the bedroom door and listens intently for a moment or so.

MRS. ROWLAND. (*in a low voice*) Alfred! Alfred! (*There is no answer from the next room and she continues suspiciously in a louder tone*) You needn't pretend you're asleep. (*There is no reply to this from the bedroom, and, reassured, she gets up from her chair and tiptoes cautiously to the dish closet. She slowly opens one door, taking great care to make no noise, and slides out, from their hiding place behind the dishes, a bottle of Gordon gin and a glass. In doing so she disturbs the top dish, which rattles a little. At this sound she starts guiltily and looks with sulky defiance at the doorway to the next room*).

(*Her voice trembling*) Alfred!

(*After a pause, during which she listens for any sound, she takes the glass and pours out a large drink and gulps it down; then hastily returns the bottle and glass to their hiding place. She closes the closet door with the same care as she had opened it, and, heaving a great sigh of relief, sinks down into her chair again. The large dose of alcohol she has taken has an almost immediate effect. Her features become more animated, she seems to gather energy, and she looks at the bedroom door with*

a hard, vindictive smile on her lips. Her eyes glance quickly about the room and are fixed on a man's coat and vest which hang from a hook at right. She moves stealthily over to the open doorway and stands there, out of sight of anyone inside, listening for any movement.

(*Calling in a half-whisper*) Alfred!

(*Again there is no reply. With a swift movement she takes the coat and vest from the hook and returns with them to her chair. She sits down and takes the various articles out of each pocket but quickly puts them back again. At last, in the inside pocket of the vest, she finds a letter*).

(*Looking at the handwriting—slowly to herself*) Hmm! I knew it.

(*She opens the letter and reads it. At first her expression is one of hatred and rage, but as she goes on to the end it changes to one of triumphant malignity. She remains in deep thought for a moment, staring before her, the letter in her hands, a cruel smile on her lips. Then she puts the letter back in the pocket of the vest, and still careful not to awaken the sleeper, hangs the clothes up again on the same hook, and goes to the bedroom door and looks in*).

(*In a loud, shrill voice*) Alfred! (*Still louder*) Alfred! (*There is a muffled, yawning groan from the next room*) Don't you think it's about time you got up? Do you want to stay in bed all day? (*Turning around and coming back to her chair*) Not that I've got any doubts about your being lazy enough to stay in bed forever. (*She sits down and looks out of the window, irritably*) Goodness knows what time it is. We haven't even got any way of telling the time since you pawned your watch like a fool. The last valuable thing we had, and you knew it. It's been nothing but pawn, pawn, pawn, with you—anything to put off getting a job, anything to get out

of going to work like a man. (*She taps the floor with her foot nervously, biting her lips*).

(*After a short pause*) Alfred! Get up, do you hear me? I want to make that bed before I go out. I'm sick of having this place in a continual muss on your account. (*With a certain vindictive satisfaction*) Not that we'll be here long unless you manage to get some money some place. Heaven knows I do my part—and more—going out to sew every day while you play the gentleman and loaf around bar rooms with that good-for-nothing lot of artists from the Square.

(*A short pause during which she plays nervously with a cup and saucer on the table*).

And where are you going to get money, I'd like to know? The rent's due this week and you know what the landlord is. He won't let us stay a minute over our time. You say you *can't* get a job. That's a lie and you know it. You never even look for one. All you do is moon around all day writing silly poetry and stories that no one will buy—and no wonder they won't. I notice I can always get a position, such as it is; and it's only that which keeps us from starving to death.

(*Gets up and goes over to the stove—looks into the coffee pot to see if the water is boiling; then comes back and sits down again*).

You'll have to get money to-day some place. I can't do it all, and I won't do it all. You've got to come to your senses. You've got to beg, borrow, or steal it somewheres. (*With a contemptuous laugh*) But where, I'd like to know? You're too proud to beg, and you've borrowed the limit, and you haven't the nerve to steal.

(*After a pause—getting up angrily*) Aren't you up yet, for heaven's sake? It's just like you to go to sleep again, or pretend to. (*She goes to the bedroom door and looks in*) Oh,

you are up. Well, it's about time. You needn't look at me like that. Your airs don't fool me a bit any more. I know you too well—better than you think I do—you and your goings-on. (*Turning away from the door—meaningly*) I know a lot of things, my dear. Never mind what I know, now. I'll tell you before I go, you needn't worry. (*She comes to the middle of the room and stands there, frowning*).

(*Irritably*) Hmm! I suppose I might as well get breakfast ready—not that there's anything much to get. (*Questioningly*) Unless you have some money? (*She pauses for an answer from the next room which does not come*) Foolish question! (*She gives a short, hard laugh*) I ought to know you better than that by this time. When you left here in such a huff last night I knew what would happen. You can't be trusted for a second. A nice condition you came home in! The fight we had was only an excuse for you to make a beast of yourself. What was the use pawning your watch if all you wanted with the money was to waste it in buying drink?

(*Goes over to the dish closet and takes out plates, cups, etc., while she is talking*).

Hurry up! It don't take long to get breakfast these days, thanks to you. All we got this morning is bread and butter and coffee; and you wouldn't even have that if it wasn't for me sewing my fingers off. (*She slams the loaf of bread on the table with a bang*).

The bread's stale. I hope you'll like it. *You* don't deserve any better, but I don't see why *I* should suffer.

(*Going over to the stove*) The coffee'll be ready in a minute, and you needn't expect me to wait for you.

(*Suddenly with great anger*) What on earth are you doing all this time? (*She goes over to the door and looks in*) Well, you're *almost* dressed at any rate. I expected to find you

back in bed. That'd be just like you. How awful you look this morning! For heaven's sake, shave! You're disgusting! You look like a tramp. No wonder no one will give you a job. I don't blame them—when you don't even look half-way decent. (*She goes to the stove*) There's plenty of hot water right here. You've got no excuse. (*Gets a bowl and pours some of the water from the coffee pot into it*) Here.

(*He reaches his hand into the room for it. It is a sensitive hand with slender fingers. It trembles and some of the water spills on the floor*).

(*Tauntingly*) Look at your hand tremble! You'd better give up drinking. You can't stand it. It's just your kind that get the D. T's. *That would be* the last straw! (*Looking down at the floor*) Look at the mess you've made of this floor—cigarette butts and ashes all over the place. Why can't you put them on a plate? No, you wouldn't be considerate enough to do that. You never think of me. You don't have to sweep the room and that's all you care about.

(*Takes the broom and commences to sweep viciously, raising a cloud of dust. From the inner room comes the sound of a razor being stropped*).

(*Sweeping*) Hurry up! It must be nearly time for me to go. If I'm late I'm liable to lose my position, and then I couldn't support you any longer. (*As an afterthought she adds sarcastically*) And then you'd have to go to work or something dreadful like that. (*Sweeping under the table*) What I want to know is whether you're going to look for a job to-day or not. You know your family won't help us any more. They've had enough of you, too. (*After a moment's silent sweeping*) I'm about sick of all this life. I've a good notion to go home, if I wasn't too proud to let them know what a failure you've been—you, the millionaire Rowland's only son, the Harvard

graduate, the poet, the catch of the town—Huh! (*With bitterness*) There wouldn't be many of them now envy my catch if they knew the truth. What has our marriage been, I'd like to know? Even before your *millionaire* father died owing every one in the world money, you certainly never wasted any of your time on your wife. I suppose you thought I'd ought to be glad you were *honorable* enough to marry me—after getting me into trouble. You were ashamed of me with your fine friends because my father's only a grocer, that's what you were. At least he's honest, which is more than any one could say about yours. (*She is sweeping steadily toward the door. Leans on her broom for a moment*).

You hoped every one'd think you'd been forced to marry me, and pity you, didn't you? You didn't hesitate much about telling me you loved me, and making me believe your lies, before it happened, did you? You made me think you didn't want your father to buy me off as he tried to do. I know better now. I haven't lived with you all this time for nothing. (*Somberly*) It's lucky the poor thing was born dead, after all. What a father you'd have been!

(*Is silent, brooding moodily for a moment—then she continues with a sort of savage joy*).

But I'm not the only one who's got you to thank for being unhappy. There's one other, at least, and *she* can't hope to marry you now. (*She puts her head into the next room*) How about Helen? (*She starts back from the doorway, half frightened*).

Don't look at me that way! Yes, I read her letter. What about it? I got a right to. I'm your wife. And I know all there is to know, so don't lie. You needn't stare at me so. You can't bully me with your superior airs any longer. Only for me you'd be going without breakfast this very morning. (*She*

sets the broom back in the corner—whiningly) You never did have any gratitude for what I've done. (*She comes to the stove and puts the coffee into the pot*) The coffee's ready. I'm not going to wait for you. (*She sits down in her chair again*).

(*After a pause—puts her hand to her head—fretfully*) My head aches so this morning. It's a shame I've got to go to work in a stuffy room all day in my condition. And I wouldn't if you were half a man. By rights I ought to be lying on my back instead of you. You know how sick I've been this last year; and yet you object when I take a little something to keep up my spirits. You even didn't want me to take that tonic I got at the drug store. (*With a hard laugh*) I know you'd be glad to have me dead and out of your way; then you'd be free to run after all these silly girls that think you're such a wonderful, misunderstood person—this Helen and the others. (*There is a sharp exclamation of pain from the next room*).

(*With satisfaction*) There! I knew you'd cut yourself. It'll be a lesson to you. You know you oughtn't to be running around nights drinking with your nerves in such an awful shape. (*She goes to the door and looks in*).

What makes you so pale? What are you staring at yourself in the mirror that way for? For goodness sake, wipe that blood off your face! (*With a shudder*) It's horrible. (*In relieved tones*) There, that's better. I never could stand the sight of blood. (*She shrinks back from the door a little*) You better give up trying and go to a barber shop. Your hand shakes dreadfully. Why do you stare at me like that? (*She turns away from the door*) Are you still mad at me about that letter? (*Defiantly*) Well, I had a right to read it. I'm your wife. (*She comes to the chair and sits down again. After a pause*).

I knew all the time you were running around with some one. Your lame excuses about spending the time at the library

didn't fool me. Who is this Helen, anyway? One of those artists? Or does she write poetry, too? Her letter sounds that way. I'll bet she told you your things were the best ever, and you believed her, like a fool. Is she young and pretty? I was young and pretty, too, when you fooled me with your fine, poetic talk; but life with you would soon wear anyone down. What I've been through!

(*Goes over and takes the coffee off the stove*) Breakfast is ready. (*With a contemptuous glance*) Breakfast! (*Pours out a cup of coffee for herself and puts the pot on the table*). Your coffee'll be cold. What are you doing—still shaving, for heaven's sake? You'd better give it up. One of these mornings you'll give yourself a serious cut. (*She cuts off bread and butters it. During the following speeches she eats and sips her coffee*).

I'll have to run as soon as I've finished eating. One of us has got to work. (*Angrily*) Are you going to look for a job to-day or aren't you? I should think some of your fine friends would help you, if they really think you're so much. But I guess they just like to hear you talk. (*Sits in silence for a moment*).

I'm sorry for this Helen, whoever she is. Haven't you got any feelings for other people? What will her family say? I see she mentions them in her letter. What is she going to do—have the child—or go to one of those doctors? That's a nice thing, I must say. Where can she get the money? Is she rich? (*She waits for some answer to this volley of questions*).

Hmm! You won't tell me anything about her, will you? Much I care. Come to think of it, I'm not so sorry for her after all. She knew what she was doing. She isn't any schoolgirl, like I was, from the looks of her letter. Does she know you're married? Of course, she must. All your friends know about your unhappy marriage. I know they pity you, but they don't know my side of it. They'd talk different if they did.

(*Too busy eating to go on for a second or so*).

This Helen must be a fine one, if she knew you were married. What does she expect, then? That I'll divorce you and let her marry you? Does she think I'm crazy enough for that—after all you've made me go through? I guess not! And you can't get a divorce from me and you know it. No one can say *I've* ever done anything wrong. (*Drinks the last of her cup of coffee*).

She deserves to suffer, that's all I can say. I'll tell you what I think; I think your Helen is no better than a common street-walker, that's what I think. (*There is a stifled groan of pain from the next room*).

Did you cut yourself again? Serves you right. (*Gets up and takes off her apron*) Well, I've got to run along. (*Peevishly*) This is a fine life for me to be leading! I won't stand for your loafing any longer. (*Something catches her ear and she pauses and listens intently*) There! You've overturned the water all over everything. Don't say you haven't. I can hear it dripping on the floor. (*A vague expression of fear comes over her face*) Alfred! Why don't you answer me?

(*She moves slowly toward the room. There is the noise of a chair being overturned and something crashes heavily to the floor. She stands, trembling with fright*).

Alfred! Alfred! Answer me! What is it you knocked over? Are you still drunk? (*Unable to stand the tension a second longer she rushes to the door of the bedroom*).

Alfred!

(*She stands in the doorway looking down at the floor of the inner room, transfixed with horror. Then she shrieks wildly and runs to the other door, unlocks it and frenziedly pulls it open, and runs shrieking madly into the outer hallway*).

(*The Curtain Falls*)

O'NEILL